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MADELEINE DE S. POL

BY

THEODORE HOWARD GALTON

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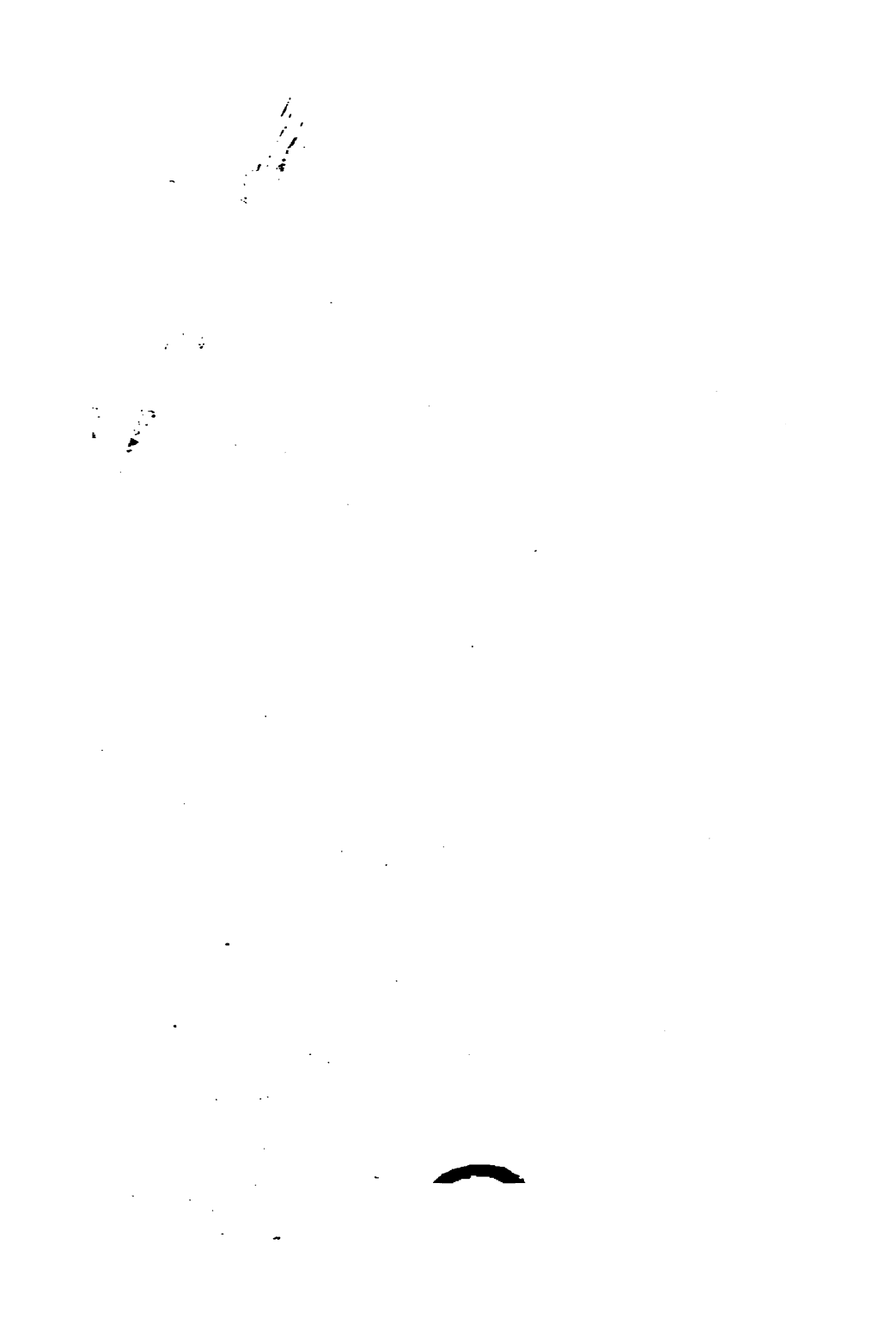

MADELEINE DE S. POL.

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A Glimpse of Worcestershire

AT THE DAWN OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

BY

THEODORE HOWARD GALTON.

"This is my own, my native Land."
—SCOTT, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, canto vi.

LONDON: BURNS AND OATES.
1881.

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THIS STORY,

REPRINTED FROM THE MAGAZINE IN WHICH IT

ORIGINALLY APPEARED, IS NOW

Dedicated

TO THE MEMORY OF HIM WHO WROTE IT

BY

HIS SONS.

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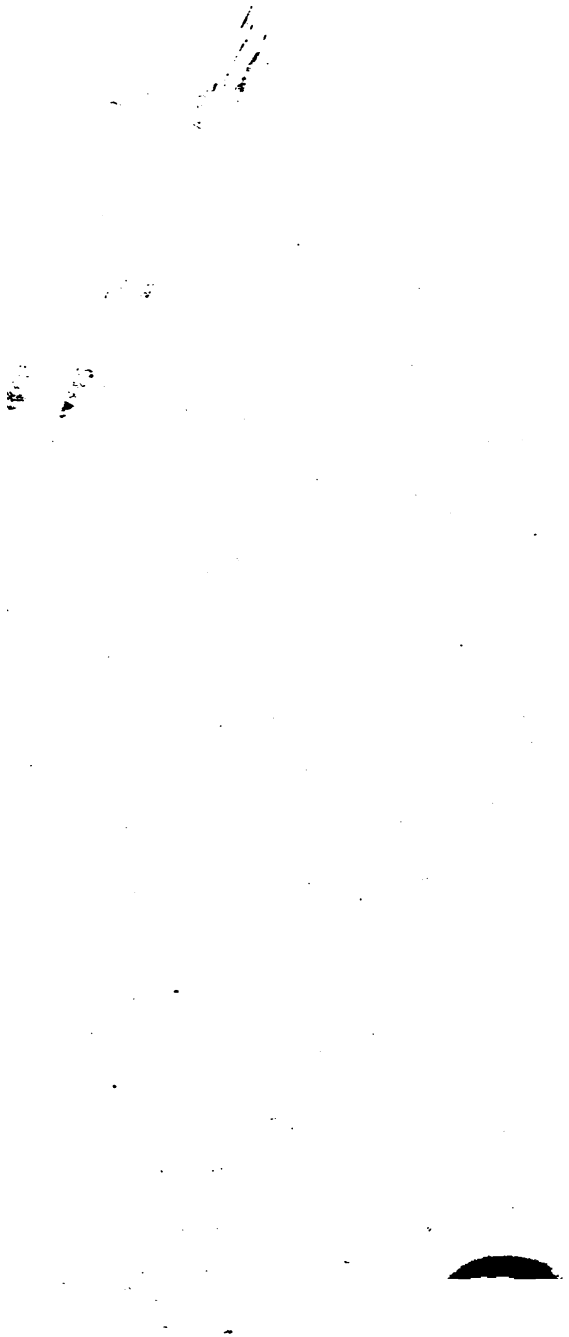
MADELEINE DE S. POL.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEATH OF AN EMIGRÉ.

PERSHULL HALL was a dilapidated mansion which had once seen better days. Situated on high ground, it commanded a view of distant hills and a prospect of green undulating fields, with a park-like domain in the foreground. The sheet of water which had formerly supplied its owners with fish for their Lenten fare had dwindled into two or three marshy ponds, overgrown with sedges and reeds, while but a few of the old oaks and elms which had once overshadowed its plaisance now remained to tell the tale of its ancestral glories. The house itself exhibited some scanty traces of the architecture of Jacobean times, but these were almost obliterated by the execrable additions and restorations of the eighteenth century. The façade was all of brick. A seventeenth-century projecting gable, overshadowing the porch, was marked with a cross in brickwork and an effaced inscription. The creepers trailed up the walls almost concealed these latter details, as well as the faint remnants of the moulded cornices surmounting the gable. The massive oak door, with its elaborate iron hinges, was among its sparse relics of the past, for the old mullioned windows had been mostly replaced by more modern casements, a few of them only retaining their leaden lattices and diamond panes. On the garden side of the mansion there were signs of greater antiquity. One end of the building was of half-timbered construction, painted black and white, and a massive stone chimney of the fifteenth century



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gazing for a moment, approached the bedside, and, falling on her knees, gently took his right hand, which held a crucifix, in hers. He raised his eyelids and gazed upon her, making an effort to speak. "Madeleine," he faintly said, speaking in his own tongue, "I shall soon leave you to go to your poor mother. Pray for me, my child. Jesus and Mary will watch over you. Pray to Jesus and Mary."

There was a crucifix between two lighted candles on a table by the bed, and she raised it gently and approached the sacred emblem to his lips, that he might press them to the feet of the Crucified.

"My Jesus, have mercy on my soul," he said.

"My father!" she cried; "my dear, dear father!" But it was too much for her.

Her kind hostess, who had been busied in preparing the temporary altar for the Holy Viaticum, whereon she placed some flowers and lighted three fresh tapers on either side of the crucifix, now perceiving that Madeleine seemed faint, came quickly forward. Taking her by the hand she raised her from her knees, whispering to her not to give way at this supreme moment whereon his eternity was depending. A domestic came in to say that the priest was approaching with the Blessed Sacrament and the holy oil. This seemed instantly to recall the girl to her senses, for she rose and suffered herself to be led to a short distance from the table, where she knelt and took the open manual presented her by her friend, joining audibly in all the responses of the sacred rites.

After silently adoring our Blessed Lord in the Host, the good old abbé sprinkled the sick man and the bystanders, reciting the Asperges and the prayer.

He then desired the attendants to retire; and although the Marquis had already on the previous day made his confession, the priest again shrived him from his sins. On the return of the assistants the dying man said in a voice more audible than could have been expected, that he wished to crave the pardon of all present or absent for every wrong he had done or scandal he had given, and every impatient word which he had ever uttered to any of them. As he said this his daughter could no longer restrain her sobs, but she bent down her head and strove hard to suppress the slightest sound. Then followed the *Ecce Agnus Dei* and the administration of the two last sacraments of Holy Church. While

Extreme Unction was being administered, young Walter, who was himself designed for the priesthood, recited the *Miserere* and other penitential psalms. In these Madeleine joined mechanically, but all the time she felt as if in a dream, and when it was concluded left the room conducted by her friend, not knowing where she was or what she was doing. She found herself kneeling in the little chapel, where she remained for a long time as in a trance.

"Come, my child," said the old curé; "your father has asked to see you. He is clear and conscious now. The holy oil has revived him."

"Thank God," she cried; "will he recover?"

"No, my child, that is not God's will; but he is better for the moment."

"He will recover. Our Lady will prevail and obtain me this favour. I know she will."

"We must all die. It is a blessed thing to die as he is doing. You would not deprive him of Paradise?"

"Oh, then I will pray God to take me too;" so saying she followed her guide downstairs.

Her father's eyes seemed closed when she entered his room, but on her approach to the bed he opened them and feebly motioned to her with his hand. She knelt and kissed his fingers, and he gave her his blessing.

"You will always put your trust in Him," he said, endeavouring to approach the crucifix which he held to her lips. "When you return to your beloved France, be faithful and true to God and His Holy Church, and take your banishment as a chastisement for the sins of our country. We have deserved it all. Pray for your poor mother and for me, and ask your guardian angel to watch over you, my child, and often beseech our Blessed Lady to protect you from the wiles of heresy and sin in this land of exile."

"My father, my own beloved father, pray for me and guard me. Our good God will hear your prayer for your poor Madeleine."

"There are some holy nuns exiled from France, living a few leagues hence, to whom the abbé will conduct you. They will comfort you if you need it. Meanwhile our kind hostess has promised me to stand your friend, but I have made the abbé your guardian and protector. You love him and will follow his directions."

"Your will, my father, is my law. I will do all that you enjoin. O my father, wherefore leave me? You are better. God will preserve you to me."

"Not so, my child. I am going away from you, but we shall meet again. I trust we shall meet again in Paradise. God's will be done."

The doctor from a neighbouring town had come, and Mrs. Wakeman, their hostess, announced his arrival to Madeleine, who rose and retired whilst the medical man approached his patient.

"He certainly seems to have taken a turn. His eyes are clearer and his pulse stronger," said the practitioner after he had inspected him.

The words were repeated to Madeleine in French by her friend, and she exclaimed:

"There are hopes, then! Ask him if there are hopes."

On Mrs. Wakeman putting the question to him, he shook his head, saying:

"You know while there is life there is hope; but these changes are not infrequent. I cannot conscientiously say that there is any solid hope of recovery."

"It is the effect of the holy oil," said M. Apedaile, the old curé, to Mrs. Wakeman when she translated the words in his hearing. "It is usually so. I have witnessed it so often."

"Do they often recover?" asked the girl, clinging to the hope of which she was unable to divest herself.

"Your father is old; but you can pray. God's arm is not shortened, and as the good doctor truly said, while there is life there is hope."

The practitioner prescribed quiet and the avoidance of all excitement for his patient, wherefore M. Apedaile and Mrs. Wakeman prevailed upon Madeleine to pursue her decorations of the chapel for the feast of the Assumption on the following day, a task not ungrateful to her, as she felt that she should thus be winning our Lady's prayers for her poor father.

She often paused from her labours to slide gently and imperceptibly into the sick-room to take a look at her beloved parent, but not until she was about to retire for the night did she again approach his bedside for his blessing.

"Farewell, my child," he said; "God bless you and bring us together again in His glorious kingdom."

"O my father, you are better. I will come early in the morning to see you before my Communion."

"Make it for me—for my soul, and say a *De profundis* after it."

"What do you mean, my dearest father? I will if you wish it."

She thought he was wandering, and kissing his hand she craved his blessing.

Her dreams that night were of her early childhood at their old château, when her mother was robing her in white for her First Communion and the sun was shining on the old church of S. Pol, where a crowd of white-veiled virgins were awaiting them. She was long in her preparations, and she dreamt a curé like M. Apedaile came and called her, bidding her hasten to the church. She heard his voice distinctly, and awoke. It was indeed the good old abbé's voice outside her door, beseeching her to hasten down to her father's room, as he was dying.

She dressed herself as quickly as she could, but when she reached the door she heard the voice of the priest uttering the well-known words: *Proficiscere anima Christiana, de hoc mundo*—"Go forth, O Christian soul, in the name of God the Father who created thee, in the name of Jesus Christ who suffered for thee, and of the Holy Ghost who was poured forth upon thee;" and so on through the hierarchies of angels and of saints, concluding with the invocation: "May thy place be this day in peace, and thine abode in holy Sion, through Christ our Lord."

She beheld the lighted taper by his side, and his head bent senseless on the pillow, the crucifix still grasped in his now motionless hand. Already had the spirit passed from its mortal tenement, and long ere the prayers had been concluded by the priest and the assistants kneeling around him, had his soul stood arraigned before the Judge and, each deed having been weighed in the final balance, had passed to its place in the world unseen.

When the priest had concluded the prayers and uttered a *De profundis*, he turned to Madeleine and said to her:

"My child, our Blessed Lady has called him to keep the feast in Paradise. You must make your Communion for him on this her great festival."

It was then four o'clock in the morning, and after kissing

the brow of the beloved one, she allowed herself to be conducted to her room while the body was laid out. She found more strength then she could have expected at the foot of the altar, and spent the day in alternate tears and petitions, lingering many hours in the chamber of death; and thus passed for Madeleine the feast of the Assumption in the year 1798.

CHAPTER II.

CHURCHILL.

MRS. WAKEMAN offered a home to the orphan, but following the advice of the good curé, who was left her sole guardian, she only accepted it for a time, as her father had suggested that she should take up her residence with the exiled nuns, among whom she hoped to find one of her countrywomen. M. Apedaile foresaw that this plan of her deceased parent would probably not be advisable as a permanency, inasmuch as their temporary convent would be but a cheerless abode for a girl of fifteen. Nevertheless, as he himself had long been domiciled in its immediate neighbourhood, around which there were the residences of two or three Catholic families, he felt that her independence would be better secured by making their house her nominal *pied à terre*, and treating her occasional sojourns with Mrs. Wakeman and other friends as visits. By this means she would avoid a condition of dependence which seemed inseparable from the well-meant proposition of their kind-hearted hostess.

In those days there were but few Catholic burying-grounds, but there chanced to be one at a manor belonging to the Talbots, where the remains of the Marquis were deposited, on the understanding that in less troublous times they might be removed to his ancestral vault in the church of S. Pol in France.

On the day following the funeral M. Apedaile proposed returning home, and when he made known his plans to Madeleine she at once besought him to allow her to accompany him.

The Marquis had succeeded during the earlier days of the emigration in placing a considerable portion of his fortune in English securities, so that Madeleine was left in a position of independence. An eminent London banker had been appointed under his will trustee to his estate, for the use of his only child. The gentleman in question, on receiving from M. Apedaile the tidings of the Marquis' death, had sent down a solicitor to take all the necessary steps towards proving the will and carrying out its provisions for the benefit of his heiress.

It was a cheerless day on which, after bidding adieu to Pershull and its kind inmates, poor Madeleine, accompanied by her French maid and the abbé, travelled in a hired post-chaise to her new home. The distance by the turnpike road was about seventeen miles. They passed through the county town of Worcester, and thence by a less frequented route to the parish of Churchill, in which the nuns were residing.

Churchill Wood was itself an extensive covert which had formerly been included in the royal forest of Feckenham, and this lay adjacent to other woods and copses extending into the neighbouring parishes of Bredecot and Crowle. It would have been difficult to find a district more thickly studded with woodland than that portion of Worcestershire, which still retained many tokens of its forest antecedents. Immediately beneath the shadow of the wood, in a snug nook which seemed to have been cut out for the purpose, stood the Wood House, an old farm homestead lent by the Catholic proprietor of the surrounding domain to the Poor Clares exiled from their English Convent at Dunkirk in 1792 by the fury of the French Revolution.* The farm, for which the old house had formerly served as the residence, had for many years been occupied by a neighbouring tenant, who continued to use the outbuildings. It was an old structure which had evidently seen better days, for there were remnants of architectural decoration and traces of a moat, seeming to prove that at some remote period it had been the abode of one of the numerous frankleins or squireens who had probably farmed his own estate. The old oak door with

* An epitaph in the churchyard of Churchill thus records these facts:—"Here repose the bodies of English nuns of the Order of Poor Clares, who when banished from Dunkirk by the fury of the French Revolution about A.D. 1792, found a refuge at Churchill."

its massive hinges was a relic of those earlier times. The place had been patched up for the nuns, who had built themselves a chapel at the back, wherein Masses were said by the two priests who had shared their banishment. There are old people still living who were wont to benefit by their ministrations, which proved a decided boon to the Catholic families scattered around that district.

M. Apedaile had prepared Madeleine for the humble character of the abode to which he was conducting her, but she was too much absorbed in her grief to notice external circumstances which, at another time, might have depressed her spirits.

When the post-chaise stopped before the garden gate, the lay-sister who had been expecting the arrival of the guests opened the house door, and awaited their approach. This *sœur tourière* was French, and Madeleine was cheered by a greeting in her own tongue. M. Apedaile only entered the vestibule which served them as a parlour, in which they had established a *grille*, as they kept their enclosure as strictly as circumstances would permit. The abbess, an aged lady of a good English family, expressed her joy at receiving Madeleine, to whom she uttered some sweet words of sympathy and consolation touching her terrible affliction. After bidding adieu to the abbé, who promised to visit her daily, she was ushered with her attendant into the house and conducted to the small chamber prepared for her.

Nothing could surpass the kindness of the good nuns, who strove in every way to cheer the poor child's solitude. Beside her maid, Françoise, she had brought with her another faithful companion, the dog Fido, who was provided with an old beer-barrel as a temporary kennel, and who invariably accompanied her in her walks. The little chapel, in which she spent several hours, was surrounded by a garden in which the nuns took their recreation. Here she loved to sit and read the books with which they provided her. She also spent a portion of her time in studying English and in practising on the small organ which they had procured for their Sunday Mass, to render it as attractive to their limited congregation as circumstances permitted. Thus the summer of 1798 drew to a close.

One day in October, when the weather was more serene than it had been for some weeks past, an autumnal fragrance

pervading the atmosphere, Madeleine, accompanied by Fido, went out to visit her beloved guardian, who had been ailing of late. He lived in a cottage on the hillside, commanding a distant view over the shire and its surroundings. The Malvern range was conspicuous in the distance, and the foreground was enlivened by the rich colouring of the autumnal tints. On approaching the garden gate, Fido began to bark, and to her surprise, the bark was answered by a growl from a fine old English mastiff already in possession of the priest's domain. When she opened the gate, the two dogs reconnoitred each other, the larger animal with a calm air of conscious superiority, while the smaller one seemed at a loss how to assert his long-established right to the premises. Afraid of a contest, the girl called Fido to her side and walked up the path to the door, at which, however, she hesitated to knock, when she saw two guns propped up under the porch and heard voices within. After pausing for a few minutes, she determined to retire, and was actually returning toward the gate when Fido's jealousy of the proud old mastiff caused him once more to bound off and take another survey of his growling antagonist. He suddenly began barking furiously, and the next moment the door opened and a young gentleman in shooting attire came forth and called loudly to Bevis to lie down.

"He is perfectly quiet—he won't hurt you, madam: I assure you you need not fear him," he said in English.

"I am afraid for Fido—for my dog," she returned in French.

"Pardon my speaking in English," he answered in her own language, which he spoke with ease. "This big dog is quite quiet. Pray come in, mademoiselle, and see M. le Curé. We only called in passing to inquire after his health; but my friend, the squire, will be only too charmed at this *rencontre*, which will have enabled him to make your acquaintance. Mademoiselle de S. Pol, I believe."

"Yes, sir," she replied; "but whom have I the honour of addressing?"

"My name, mademoiselle, is Frank Wyvil. I am only a guest at the Park. Old Squire Mowbray was aware of your presence at the convent, and was anxious to make your acquaintance, and have the honour of presenting you to Mrs. Mowbray, his niece, and some other ladies who are staying

with him. In fact, that was one of our objects in calling on the good abbé this morning, so that our meeting is well timed."

"Ah! you speak French perfectly: you have been in France?"

"I was educated at S. Omer, and what is more, mademoiselle, I have been at S. Pol when I was a boy. Do you remember two boys being brought by an old abbé for the vacances de Pâques in 1789? You were then quite a little girl and showed us your rabbits and canaries. I remember it as if it were yesterday."

"Ah! is it possible? I remember it too—two brothers, Henri and François; and you are one of them? Where is Henri?"

"My poor brother died," he replied in a tone of sadness.

"Ah, then you too have had sorrow?"

By this time the old squire himself appeared at the door.

"Ha, ha!" he exclaimed in his own language, for he was not such an adept as his young friend in speaking French, "you seem to have introduced yourself to mademoiselle, Master Frank, so perhaps you will present her to an old fellow, who asks no better than to make acquaintance with the young lady who has done him the honour to come and reside in his neighbourhood. You can't speak our lingo yet, I suppose, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, a little; I understand your words."

"Very well, very well; we shall get on. The good abbé here promised to introduce me to you, but I have not yet ventured to intrude. I hope now we shall become better acquainted, and that you will do us the honour to come and see us at the Park. Mrs. Mowbray or my niece will have the pleasure of waiting upon you up yonder at Wood House. They are very poor quarters for you, mademoiselle, very poor; but you must come and stay at the Park—you must indeed!"

"Oh, no; thank you, sir, for your kind proposal, but I am in mourning, deep mourning, for my father: I go nowhere. You will excuse me, sir, I am sure."

The latter portion of the reply was in French.

"Come, come; we shall see, we shall see. You must not always live as a recluse, mademoiselle; but you shall talk

it over with my niece, who speaks French fluently. At all events, you will permit Mrs. Mowbray to call upon you?"

"It will be a great pleasure to make her acquaintance; but, indeed, sir, I am quite unfit for society at present, being still in deep mourning for my poor father." This she said in a voice which proved that her words reflected the feelings of her heart.

She found M. Apedaile suffering from acute pains in his chest and back, which the doctor whom he had consulted attributed to rheumatism, but which he himself believed to proceed from a malady of the vital organs.

"I should be glad, my child, if you would bring yourself to accept the proffered acquaintance of Mrs. Mowbray, as it may be serviceable to you. You have so few friends here in England, and God knows how soon it may please Him to—in short, to call me to follow your dear father to eternal rest."

"My beloved guardian, say not so. You will recover; God will not deprive me of my only friend."

"His will be done. I know that the doctor says I shall soon be better; but I am old, older in constitution than in years, and, saving for your sake, I am not loath to quit this evil world, and can say that I accept death as a homage to His Divine Majesty, and as an expiation for my sins. However, I thank Him for these premonitory sufferings, which I try to unite with His upon the cross, saying a *Deo gratias* for all I undergo. Patience, patience!"

"How uncomfortable you are in that chair: let me place a pillow under your head, and give you a tabouret for your feet," she said, as she busied herself to render his position more easy. "Your hands are so cold; you should have some fire to warm you. I will light it."

He allowed her to prosecute her charitable task, unwilling to make a display of the mortifications which he practised in secret.

"Your room looks so cheerless; I will try and get some flowers to enliven it."

"To me it looks like a beautiful garden as long as it contains the fair flower I now see in it. But promise me, Madeleine, that you will not refuse to go and spend a short time with the good lady at the neighbouring château, if she

asks you. You can come and see me daily from thence, as well as from the convent."

"Do you really insist, my good father? for if so, I obey."

"I believe it will be for your good, my child."

"She has not asked me yet; but if she does, and you desire it, it must be on condition that she allows me to visit you each day."

She returned to the Wood House for her midday meal, and scarcely had she reached her room, when the *sœur tourière* came to inform her of the arrival of the younger Mrs. Mowbray.

On entering the parlour, she found a lady remarkable for her beauty, who received her with an affability and kindness which went to her heart. Her French was fluent, without being purely vernacular. She said that she had driven over in her carriage with the intention of taking Madeleine back to the Park. The girl expressed her anxiety about M. Apedaile, but was reassured when the lady informed her that her uncle intended persuading the good abbé to sojourn for a while beneath their roof, where his health would be better attended to than in the cottage, and where she herself would be able to bestow constant attention upon his wants.

"And poor Fido?" said the girl, remembering her faithful dog.

"Fido must come too, if you mean the black spaniel which always follows you. So let your maid pack up all your things, and come at once, that we may get back in time for dinner. We dine early—at three o'clock."

"And the Reverend Mother Abbess?"

"I have seen her at the *grille*," returned the lady; "she quite gives her consent."

"But I must see her, and thank her for all her kindness. Besides, I shall come back. This is my home; my father wished me to make it my home. I am only going to pay you a visit, *bien entendu*, is it not so?"

"Certainly; a long visit I hope; the longer the better—that is, as long as you find us agreeable."

"I am still so young, you know; I ought to study, to finish my education."

"You can practise music with my sisters-in-law, and read English if you like."

"Oh, I should like that," she said; and her heart fluttered with delight at the prospect of meeting other girls, and acquiring the accomplishments befitting her age and station.

The good abbess appeared as much delighted as the girl herself at an opportunity which was indeed partly of her own contriving, since she had more than once suggested the idea to her confessor, Father Southworth, who, in turn, had hinted it to the priest at Boughfield, through whom it had reached the good old squire and his wife.

CHAPTER III.

FRANK WYVIL.

IN a short time Madeleine was driving in the great family coach with young Mrs. Mowbray, Françoise, and Fido towards the mansion of Boughfield Park. The abode in question was a brick structure, said to have formed the stables of a far more stately residence burnt down by Cromwell's soldiers before or during the memorable siege of Worcester. Additions had been made to the former outbuildings to render them commodious, and antiquity had imparted a venerable appearance to the place; yet notwithstanding these adaptations the hall was scarcely worthy of the magnificent domain which surrounded it. The grand elms and oaks of the old deer park told the tale of its ancestral glories, and there were remains of a stately avenue a mile long, which had formed the approach to the moated mansion from Worcester. The very tradition of this present house having been the stables to the former, was a sufficient proof of the size and magnificence of the more ancient hall.

Madeleine experienced an inexpressible thrill of delight when, after her long seclusion, she found herself ushered into a house tenanted by young ladies, who, although older than herself, were yet sufficiently juvenile to prove suitable companions. The old squire, whose third wife was then living, had no children of his own, and his property was secured upon his nephew Robert, whose father, by a second marriage with the heiress of the Comptons, had left two daughters, Francesca and Anne, coheiresses to the extensive estates of that ancient family. These two young ladies were

then on a visit to their uncle; their own home, Hartlip Hall, being only three or four miles distant.

Francesca, who was the more attractive of the two sisters, was at that time engaged to be married to the scion of an old Catholic family in Gloucestershire. Both sisters spoke French fluently, and at once made Madeleine feel at home in their society.

Frank Wyvil may possibly have experienced a vague desire of paying his addresses to Anne, whose position as the heiress of Hartlip rendered her a most desirable *parti;* but no sooner had Madeleine appeared at the Hall than he seemed to relinquish all his thrifty resolutions, and to abandon the less engaging English damsel for the lovely French girl whose charms had captivated him at once. He lost no opportunity of conversing with her and endeavouring to make her sensible of the admiration with which she inspired him. He was decidedly good-looking, with dark hair and eyes, and features lighted up by an expression of vivacity and good humour, reminding her of her own countrymen.

During the first few days Anne and her sister were tempted to attribute Frank's attentions to Madeleine to the fact of his early acquaintance with her at S. Pol, and to his natural desire to make her feel at home amongst them; but when they perceived that he became absorbed in her society, and exclusive in his devotion, Anne, at least, was not without some feeling of jealousy, which it required all the exercise of her charity not to vent upon the young French girl.

On Sunday, after Mass in the small domestic chapel, the day being unusually fine and sunshiny, the party wandered forth into the park to spend the three or four hours preceding their early dinner. After a time they became dispersed, and Frank found himself jabbering French to his fair companion, to whom he poured out all his views of life as freely as if she had been his sister, or his betrothed. They had almost unconsciously extended their walk beyond the boundaries of the deer park towards a wooded knoll, whence there was a lovely and extensive view in all directions, and on which there was a seat overshadowed by some tall elms, commanding the delightful prospect of the Malvern Hills. They sat down without a thought of what they were doing, and continued their conversation. The faithful Fido was in

attendance on his mistress, and enjoyed the walk as much as any of the party.

"And tell me," pursued Frank, looking into the beautiful eyes of his fair companion, "do you intend some day to return to France?"

"Ah! Heaven knows," she sighed; "I am a poor orphan, and all our estates have been confiscated. My uncle perished five years ago beneath the guillotine at Arras, and I have no friends or relations left. Nevertheless, God knows. They say that Bonaparte wishes well to all the emigrés, and that many have been restored to their estates. But whom have I to plead my cause?"

"I fear that an Englishman stands a poor chance at present, but I will do my best if you will make me your agent in the matter. Why should you not? You say you have no friends. You forget *me*, Madeleine. I at least am devoted to you, and will be your friend."

A tear had fallen from her eye, and she looked down, embarrassed by his manner.

"M. Apedaile is my guardian," she muttered.

"He is infirm and old. You need a younger protector. Ah, Madeleine, believe me, I love you more than life itself, and will face every danger to prove myself worthy of—of this hand," pressing hers in his as he spoke.

"Oh, no, I must not," she replied, colouring deeply; "I must not so soon after my poor father's death. I must promise you nothing without first consulting my good guardian."

"I do not ask you to promise; I only ask you to suffer me to love you, Madeleine."

"No, not without your first speaking to my guardian."

"If he consents, what then?"

"Oh, Mr. Wyvil, you ought not to have addressed me thus. Let us return—we are late."

She rose hastily and turned her face homewards, advancing with a speed which rendered it difficult for him to renew his conversation.

"Madeleine," he said, after a long pause, "will you do me one favour? Will you forgive me what has passed, and at all events mention it to no one excepting to your guardian?"

"I promise that," she said, "but on one condition, that you refrain from renewing your conversation. You must see M. Apedaile yourself."

When they returned the bell had sounded for dinner, and the two sisters were evidently put out by their long absence. Anne could not avoid showing the annoyance which she felt, and imparting her disapproval to her aunt, the elder Mrs. Mowbray.

"Where have you been, Madeleine?" asked the latter in a tone of remonstrance. "Young ladies do not usually wander off for long walks without a *chaperon*. I thought that in France they were more particular than in England about such matters, unless the Revolution has changed their manners in these respects."

"It was my fault," exclaimed Frank; "we walked on without thinking that we were separated from the rest, and so reached Crookberrow Hill, where the entrancing view detained us a short time."

Madeleine was pierced to the quick by Anne's manner and Mrs. Mowbray's remarks, and it was all she could do to restrain her feelings.

During the remainder of the day she endeavoured to avoid Frank Wyvil's attentions, determined to take the first opportunity of seeking her guardian in order to pour out her perplexities and obtain his counsel. Her position was rendered the more intolerable by the constraint to which the young man's indiscretion had given rise. During the evening she was treated by the two sisters, but more especially the younger, with marked coldness. The poor girl was too sensitive not to feel keenly this alteration in their manner, and as soon as she could decently contrive it, she escaped to the solitude of her room and gave vent to a flood of tears.

There was a mixed feeling in her mind, for beside the sense of injustice under which she was labouring, there was a secret acknowledgment in her heart that she really liked the young man who had paid his addresses to her, and withal a certainty, evident to her feminine tact, that he preferred her to Anne, who was consequently jealous of her triumph. At the same time her strictly religious training led her to the conclusion that Mrs. Mowbray's remark was obviously correct, and that she ought never to have wandered off alone with Frank, and have thus encouraged a familiarity which, when she reflected upon it, humbled her in her own eyes. Overcome by this combination of doubts and perplexities, she sat motionless by the moonlit casement without ringing for

her maid. She was recalled to herself by a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of the younger Mrs. Mowbray.

"My child, what are you thinking about?" exclaimed that lady in a kind and winning voice. "I thought you had gone to bed. Are you suffering and in pain?"

"Oh, Mrs. Mowbray," cried Madeleine, "how good of you to come to me!"

"You have been weeping, Madeleine. They have been unkind to you, those girls, but own that you were indiscreet to go off alone with Mr. Wyvil. It was his fault, I am sure. He is a dreadful flirt, and Anne is as jealous as a girl can be. Until you came he was paying his addresses to her, and she thinks you have won his affections from her. The sooner he leaves us the better. Tell me, did he say anything to you? Did he pay you compliments and try to win your affections, for he is quite capable of it?"

"I wish I had never come here," returned Madeleine; "I was much better at the convent. Why should you send Mr. Wyvil away? It is I who must go away. I will go and see my guardian to-morrow, and then, with his permission, return to the nuns. When I am gone, Miss Anne will have him to herself."

"Don't be too sure of that. I am afraid that whatever mischief has been done in that quarter cannot be undone by your departure. However, if you don't care for him I shall be quite happy, for I am sure he is one of those whose heart will soon right itself. I tell you he is an arrant flirt."

Madeleine was silent.

"Dear Madeleine," pursued the lady, taking her hand, "you have not answered my question. What did Mr. Wyvil say to you?"

"Please do not insist. I will speak to my guardian, M. Apedaile, and tell him everything. Perhaps he will think it better I should forget Mr. Wyvil altogether, and, if so, I should regret having repeated any foolish words he may have uttered inadvertently, especially as you say he is a flirt."

"Well, my child, as you please; but remember to tell your guardian what I say, that Frank Wyvil's speeches are mere flirtation and compliment—in short, as we English say, that his promises are pie-crust. I can guess the sort of things he said to you as well as if you told me, and what is more, I daresay you believed him at the time. I am sure he tried

to make you think he is over head and ears in love with you and that he is quite prepared to propose to you. But you may take my word for it, he will have forgotten all about you a week hence, especially if he gets amongst his Protestant friends. I assure you he is dreadfully lax in his ways of going on, and has taken up with all these new revolutionary ideas. I am not certain but that he passes himself off for a freethinker when he is with some of his acquaintances in London—so I have been told."

She left poor Madeleine in some respects more disconsolate than she found her; but on the whole, the remedy, although severe, was not inefficacious. It served at all events to brace her nerves, and when she woke next morning at an early hour, she was able to form her resolutions without a moment's hesitation. While it was still dusk, and before the household were astir, she went off to see the good old abbé, who lived less than a mile distant, purposing to be back for Mass in the little chapel.

CHAPTER IV.

"THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE."

MADELEINE found her guardian better than usual, and preparing to start for the Wood House to say his Mass. She accompanied him, and as they went along he was concluding his Office, which gave her time to collect her thoughts. She subsequently revealed to him all her temptations and difficulties, as well as her determination to leave the Hall and return to the nuns. The good old priest had been pressed by the squire to take up his abode at Boughfield, and, as his health had improved so much during the last week, he had signified his intention of going there that same day. He had been greatly consoled by the thought that Madeleine was established in the good graces of this worthy family, from whose friendship and protection he augured well for her future. It was consequently with surprise and grief that he learnt of the unpleasantness which had arisen, and more especially of the jealousy of Miss Anne Mowbray. The girl was fully sensible of her own imprudence, and wept bitterly as she recounted faults, which were in truth but the fruits of inexperience, free from the slightest taint of malice. Nevertheless she was sensible of having exhibited some weakness in assenting to Wyvil's addresses by referring him to her guardian. The momentary illusion had been dispelled by what she had subsequently heard of him from Mrs. Mowbray, and she felt inclined to accuse herself of her previous leanings as a grievous sin. The abbé reassured and at the same time cautioned her against giving any

further encouragement to one of whom she had previously known nothing, and who might have been the merest adventurer. By his advice she spent the morning at the Wood House, while he kindly undertook to explain matters to her hosts at the Hall.

Her absence created some consternation, but the younger Mrs. Mowbray, suspecting whither she had gone, apologised for her absence. Frank Wyvil grew uneasy and suspicious. Although he had not overheard the observations addressed to Madeleine by the elder Mrs. Mowbray, he had noted the coldness of Anne, and had not failed to attribute the girl's altered manner towards himself to its true cause. He perhaps exaggerated his own influence, and made up his mind that she was suffering persecution on his account. This determined him to follow her injunctions to the letter by going at once to the abbé and having an explanation with him. He was really in love with her, or at least imagined himself to be so. Had she been penniless, he might possibly have come to a different conclusion, for during his uncle's lifetime he could not afford to marry without money, but he believed that Mdlle. de S. Pol was an heiress, or at all events that she had enough to enable him to live comfortably. She was very young, but this was in her favour, as he should be able to train her to his tastes. Her unquestionable beauty could not fail to be admired in London society. In short, he made up his mind that his interests and sympathies all coincided to favour this alliance.

Meanwhile the feminine portion of the Mowbray family had been in consultation as to how they night politely curtail Wyvil's visit, but had failed in maturing their scheme; for when old Mrs. Mowbray ventured on hinting something of the kind to the squire, she at once perceived it to be utterly repugnant to his notions of hospitality. After breakfast Frank sauntered off unperceived, and made his way to the abbé's cottage. Hearing that the priest had not returned from saying his Mass at the Wood House, he expressed some astonishment at his recovery, but besought the matron in charge to allow him to await his arrival. Seating himself in the room which served as a parlour, he remained until his patience was nearly exhausted. Just as he was beginning to give up his attempt in despair, he heard the sound of carriage wheels and beheld the younger Mrs. Mowbray's phaeton

drawn up before the garden gate, while the servant approached the door. Not wishing to be discovered, he slipped a crown piece into the woman's hand as she passed to answer the knock, begging her not to mention his presence. He was rather disconcerted when he perceived that the visitor drove on in the direction of the Wood House, as he augured that her interview with the abbé might delay his return. After waiting for a whole hour, even his lover's patience began to flag, and having walked round and round the small room like a bear in a cage, he wandered into the garden and finally across some fields from which he could catch a glimpse of the nuns' abode. The day was bright and pleasant, and tempted him onwards. As he crossed a meadow he could see the carriage drawn up in front of the old house, but not a sign of any of its inmates. At some distance to his right, at the summit of the rising ground, stood the little village and church of Churchill, with a pathway leading up to it. This he followed, and sauntered round the churchyard. At the back of the edifice was an artificial mound surrounded by a dyke, seeming to prove that the place had once been the site of a castellated mansion, the abode of some doughty knight of old, who had established his stronghold in the vicinity of God's house, to which he afforded protection in return for the spiritual benefits derived from its proximity. The turf-covered mound exhibited no remains of masonry, but from its summit he was able to command a lovely and extensive view of the surrounding country. No sooner had he reached the platform at the top of this acclivity than his attention was arrested by voices immediately beneath, and approaching the bank he perceived, seated in the dry fosse or moat under the shadow of an ash, two men, who turned round on hearing his footsteps. They had apparently concluded a repast, for one of them held an empty bottle in his hand, while the other was offering a bone to a lurcher lying at his feet. A suspicious-looking case covered with tarpaulin lay on the grass. It might possibly have contained a fishing-rod, but more likely a fowling-piece. There were not wanting other indications which led Wyvil to the conclusion that they were poachers. The countenance of the elder man, who might have been from forty to fifty, was coarse and repulsive, and his attire neglected. His features were not irregular, but bloated, and his face marked with

smallpox. His eyes, deeply sunk in his head, exhibited an unpleasant leer. He wore a soiled green shooting-coat, with corduroy breeches and gaiters, greasy and stained from long use. His companion was a much younger man in a smock-frock, of remarkably short stature, and with a coarse animal expression, round face, fresh complexion, and a curly head of hair.

"Good morning, master," exclaimed the elder of the two, in an off-hand but mistrustful tone. "If you bain't a stranger you can perhaps put us on the road to Wych? We be travellers."

"Travellers are you, my good fellows?" returned Wyvil. "I am a stranger in this country, but I can tell you in a general way the direction of Wych. It lies out there to the north."

"We be going toward Bromsgrove and Brummagem, master."

"You look as if you were sportsmen. I hope you are not after any of the squire's game?"

"Lor', sir, we bain't after nothing o' that sort. We've come a long way, master—and are travellers, that's all."

"What of the lurcher? He looks as if he could run a hare at a pinch."

"Not he—he don't know a hare from a rabbit or a cat—not when he sees him. Do you, Tray? Not he. He is more of a lady's lapdog, if he warn't so big—as quiet as a lamb. But I say, Dick 'Emming, we must be starting. It's a getting late in the day, and we've got a sight o' way to go before we gets to our journey's end. I daresay the gen'lman will excuse us."

They had both risen and were in the act of departing, when the same individual, pointing to the ominous-looking case, said:

"Youngster, you carry that ere bundle o' sticks. Them be some willow rods we have been getting for our trade—the basket-making line, ain't it, Dick?"

Hemming replied by a grin, and Wyvil laughed outright.

"You be a carpenter, any how," pursued the former speaker.

"Well, all I hope is that you will leave Squire Mowbray's pheasants and hares alone, and go anywhere else you please. Good morning."

"The same to you, master. You bain't his keeper, I'll be sworn, and you may make sure, sir, we won't hurt your sport. Give us a shilling to drink your health, squire!"

"There," returned Wyvil, handing them a coin, while feeling half ashamed of his act.

"That's like a gen'lman all over. Belike I've seen your honour before now. Warn't you shooting with Squire Cecil a twelvemonth since, when some of the tenants war out, and along with 'em that ere darned West Indy captain, who was like to a fell foul o' one of the keepers for swearing he missed a hare?"

"What were you doing there? I thought you were a basket-maker at Brummagem just now?"

"Jack-of-all-trades, that's my line. I'm not loath to a bit of quiet sport sometimes. I'll not deny it. If ever you come my way, squire, and cared for some genteel rabbit-shooting, I might put your honour in the way on it."

"Where shall I have the honour of waiting upon you?" returned Wyvil, laughing.

"Well, you know, my residence is of a strictly private character, and I does not care to make it too common, as you may say. I'm one o' those who enjoys privacy, and so I live secluded like. A kind of hermit as they calls 'em. Not even my best friends knows where I live—does they, Dick? Here's a young 'un as I've known all his life, and who don't know where his best friend lives—do you, Dick?"

"Well, but if no one knows where you live, how am I to call on you and get the rabbit-shooting? But I must be off, and your dog is of the same opinion, for I see he is eager to be after yonder hare, in spite of his ignorance of game! Good morrow, and take care not to poach on this manor, that is all."

So saying they parted company, and the two scoundrels stole away under a hedge and were soon lost to sight.

Frank sauntered back across the fields, noting, when he came in view of the Wood House, that the carriage was no longer visible.

He found M. l'Abbé Apedaile at the cottage, and it was not without a certain feeling of trepidation that he approached the subject of his visit. He opened the conversation in French with ordinary allusions, inquiring particularly after the priest's health. Notwithstanding the cheerful turn which

he sought to impart to the discourse, he was somewhat discouraged, by the depressed and preoccupied manner of his host, from opening the question which had brought him thither.

"You have been to the convent of the nuns? You must have seen Mrs. Mowbray there, sir, and, perhaps, Mdlle. de S. Pol."

"I have seen them both," returned the abbé laconically.

"Mdlle. de S. Pol may perhaps have said something to you, sir, touching our conversation yesterday." He paused for a minute, but perceiving that the priest only nodded assent to his words, he continued:

"She referred me to you, M. l'Abbé."

"She is very young—a mere child."

"It is true, and yet, sir, she is very sensible, and oh! so charming and beautiful. I never contemplated such perfection before!"

"She is so very young, sir, that I almost wonder that, knowing something of the world, you should have ventured to pay your addresses to her in the sudden off-hand way you did without first speaking to her friends. I know that in England you do these things differently from the way in which we conduct them in France. But making allowance for such difference of custom, it would surely have been more considerate and in better taste to have spoken, if not to me, at least to Mrs. Mowbray."

Wyvil felt nettled, both by his manner and words.

"I said nothing to Mdlle. de S. Pol of which I need be ashamed, or which the youngest maiden might not hear."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but did you not ask her hand and press hers as you did so? Did you not avow your love and request her permission to love her?"

"Yes, M. l'Abbé, I offered her marriage, and I am come here to renew the offer to you, sir, her guardian and protector. Perhaps I ought to have gone first to you. I will acknowledge that there I was in fault; but at all events *you* will not refuse me the boon which *she* has granted?"

"You have no right, I think, to say that. At all events she was not aware of having accepted your offer."

"No, not in words, but she left me under the impression that she was not unfavourable to my suit."

"Poor little girl! you misunderstood her, and yet, am I

not right in saying, that she not only gave you no promise, but scarcely spoke to you after your rash proposal?"

"Yes, sir," returned Wyvil.

"She was scared. I must tell you plainly, sir, that Mdlle. de S. Pol has commissioned me to decline your suit, and to beg that you will refrain from ever renewing it."

"You mean by that, M. l'Abbé, that her friends, the Mowbrays and yourself, have persuaded her to reject my proposal. Deign to listen to me, sir. I do not blame you, M. l'Abbé, nor do I attribute this to you; but I perceived from the first that the Miss Mowbrays were jealous of Mdlle. de S. Pol, and I am also aware that you have had an interview with Mrs. Mowbray this morning. Without being guilty of self-laudation, I think I may fairly say, that in a material point of view the match would be an advantageous one to Mdlle. de S. Pol. I am heir-presumptive to a large property, of ancient lineage, and connected with many of our best old Catholic families. She has no doubt a protector in you, M. l'Abbé, and you will, I trust, live many a long year to watch over her; but life is uncertain, even for the youngest, and when you are gone, she has no one to guard her interests. It would, surely, be desirable not to reject one who loves her more than life itself, and would willingly sacrifice his existence to render her happy. Pray reflect on what I say, M. l'Abbé. I feel certain she does not dislike me; indeed I am persuaded that were the matter left to her own free choice she would decide in my favour. She has no doubt been swayed by the Mowbrays and by yourself (your opinion of me being derived from them) to authorise you to reject my suit."

"You will excuse my speaking frankly," returned the Abbé, "but it is evident, M. Wyvil, that neither Mdlle. de S. Pol nor I myself can know anything of you beyond your agreeable address, excepting through the Mowbrays. Now, I am given to understand that you came to Boughfield ostensibly to pay your addresses to Miss Anne Mowbray, and that until Mdlle. de S. Pol made her appearance on the scene, you were constant in your attentions to that lady. Afterwards, as soon as my ward arrived at the Hall, you entirely changed your manner to the former and became devoted to Mdlle. Madeleine. Of course this would naturally

give great offence to the ladies of the family, and it also had the effect of awakening their jealousy and of causing my ward to be treated with coldness and suspicion. Her *séjour* has been rendered miserable, and she is quite resolved not to return to her kind hosts (for I cannot but acknowledge them to be such) while you remain under their roof. My ward is a mere child after all, and I, for one, should strongly deprecate her entering into any engagement, even of an unexceptionable character; but where, to speak frankly, she knows nothing of the gentleman, and hears reports that he has already earned a reputation for fine speeches, compliments, and flirtations, it would be madness in herself and her friends to afford the slightest encouragement to such addresses. Besides, M. Wyvil, she is my ward, and I am responsible for her. You will pardon my plain speaking?"

"May I see Mdlle. de S. Pol before I go, for I have determined to go away? I am, indeed, pained to think that my unfortunate admiration of your ward should have alienated from her the kindness of her hosts, and have rendered her visit miserable. I owe an apology for my conduct."

"No, no; you had better not see her again. What advantage would there be in such an interview? None, but simply pain—pain to both."

"I will strive to say nothing to cause her pain. I assure you that I love her far too sincerely to cause her the slightest shade of pain. But I should be leaving her under false impressions of myself and my conduct were I to go away without an explanation. Wherever I go, through the wide world, I shall carry her image in my heart, and I shall look forward to a day when I can renew my offer under happier circumstances. In the meantime I will prove myself worthy of her by my constancy and fidelity."

"Allow me to say, dear sir, that these are phrases which thousands of lovers have uttered. If you had an interview with her now and repeated your protestations, they would still only be phrases. If you convert the phrases into deeds by months or years of constancy, you could return with a better grace to make your explanations. Therefore be it so. As her guardian, I feel compelled to use my authority to refuse you the interview, but I do not debar you from all future prospects of winning her good opinion. Although, certainly, I hold out no hopes whatever."

Notwithstanding the firmness of the Abbé's rejection, and the apparent sternness of his words, there was a courtesy and affability in his mode of refusal which caused them to part *à l'amiable.* Frank Wyvil devised an excuse for leaving Boughfield that afternoon on a long-promised visit to some friends in a neighbouring county.

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER BEREAVEMENT.

THE effect of the incident related in our last chapter upon Madeleine was not unfavourable to the development of her character. It rendered her more cautious, but it also gave her a confidence in her own powers which she had not previously experienced. Mrs. Mowbray, who had taken a strong fancy to her from the first, always stood her friend, and gradually succeeded in clearing away all the misunderstandings which had arisen between her and her husband's half-sisters.

The elder was at that time engaged to be married to the scion of an old family. On her coming of age it had been necessary to partition the Compton estates between the two coheiresses, and having divided them as equally as circumstances would admit, they drew lots according to seniority, when the Gloucestershire estates fell to the share of the elder, and the old domain of the Habingtons to the younger. Thomas Mowbray, the younger brother of the old squire of Boughfield, had been twice married, and by his second marriage with the heiress of the Comptons had come into possession of these extensive estates. Subsequently to this marriage he had lived and died at Hartlip. Although his elder son, Robert, had, of course, no claim whatever to the property of his stepmother, yet after her death he continued, under an agreement with the trustees, to reside at the old Hall, together with his half-sisters. After remaining for a few weeks with their uncle at Boughfield, Robert Mowbray, with Francesca and Anne, returned to their own home, and

Mrs. Robert Mowbray persuaded Madeleine to accompany them.

Young Mr. Wyniatt, Francesca's betrothed, came to stay with them as soon as they returned to Hartlip, and Madeleine was chiefly dependent upon Mrs. Mowbray and Anne for society. Although the latter had nominally forgiven Mdlle. de S. Pol for what she secretly regarded as the crime of alienating from her the affections of Frank Wyvil, yet she could never entirely free herself from a certain rankling, which at times rendered her impatient of her presence. Despite all Madeleine's efforts to please her, Anne could not help occasionally showing her aversion. The poor girl felt this acutely, and but for the constant kindness and affection of Mrs. Mowbray, her sojourn at the old Tudor mansion would have been intolerable. There was a gloom about the grand old place, with its diamond casements, thick walls honeycombed with priests' holes and hiding-places, its long dark corridors and tapestried chambers, which, notwithstanding its commanding position at the apex of a sunny knoll amidst a park containing magnificent timber, was depressing to a young girl deprived of the lively companionship of those of her own age and country.

In those days there was, as a general rule, but little interchange of civilities between the old Catholic families and their Protestant neighbours. Although the penal laws had been materially relaxed, if not absolutely abolished, there was still a customary line of social demarcation between the descendants of the recusants and those of their persecutors. To this there were, no doubt, many laudable exceptions, especially among persons of higher position, who frequently made it a point to do all in their power to break down these ancient barriers of prejudice and intolerance. The very fact of the exclusion of Catholics from political rights created a sympathy in their favour, for even those who would have voted against them upon party grounds, pitied the individual victims of a manifest grievance. Their long isolation made many of them shy of intruding themselves into county society, although it had become the fashion for a certain number to set themselves against this exclusive tendency, and to do their best to thrust themselves forward and assume their proper place in public life. The French Revolution had spread a leaven of Liberalism amongst English Catholics,

and the Cisalpine Club was the result of time-serving views, which culminated in a policy of compromise. Catholics felt sorely their exclusion from political and public life, and this exclusion was even more galling when the era of open persecution had ceased, than while the penal laws continued in force. A greater wrong is often easier to bear than a smaller one. In the former case men's backs are up, and they feel like soldiers in face of the enemy; in the latter they are nominally friends, although treated with contempt and exclusion. It is easier to avow hostility to an open enemy than to proclaim disagreeable truths to a pretended friend, from whose friendship men are hoping to benefit.

Hartlip was only visited by a few of the Protestant county families, but among those who had made a point of paying their respects to its inmates were Mr. and Mrs. Shelsley, of Stourgrove, the former of whom was a Whig M.P., and a warm supporter of Catholic emancipation. Distance had precluded any great familiarity, and their intercourse had been limited to one or two formal visits. However, on one occasion when Mrs. Shelsley was making a round from Worcester, it occurred to her to call on the Mowbrays as she passed their entrance gate. She admired the old Hall, and was pleased at the opportunity of renewing her acquaintance with its inmates. The servant ushered her into the drawing-room, under the impression that Mrs. Mowbray was there, but she found Madeleine alone in the room. The former, who was tall and handsome, with the easy and winning manners of a woman of the world, was captivated by the frank simplicity of Mdlle. de S. Pol as she rose to meet her and apologise for the absence of her hostess, who was walking in the park. Perceiving she was French, Mrs. Shelsley addressed her with tolerable facility in her own language, and speedily drew out from her all the circumstances of her history. As she was anxious to see the beauties of the old place, she proposed to accompany her in search of Mrs. Mowbray, and as they were long in finding her they had a good opportunity of becoming acquainted. Madeleine was fascinated by the charm of Mrs. Shelsley's manners and conversation, and the latter was scarcely less pleased by the beautiful young foreigner, of whom she determined not to lose sight. Before leaving Mrs. Mowbray, she entreated her to promise them a visit to Stourgrove during the following

week, accompanied by Mdlle. de S. Pol, and shortly after her return home she despatched a formal invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Mowbray, the Misses Mowbray, and Mdlle. de S. Pol, to spend two or three nights at their seat. The Misses Mowbray declined, as Francesca was unwilling to quit her intended, and Anne could not leave her without a chaperon; but Mr. and Mrs. Mowbray and Madeleine went to stay at Stourgrove.

The party was rather a mixed one. There was a Herefordshire peer and his wife, a Warwickshire baronet, and a county Member, also with their belongings; the young Lord Shelsley, a youth of nineteen, first cousin to the Squire of Stourgrove, and some juvenile guardsmen on leave. Beside these, there were a few neighbours invited to dinner, and a parson (from one of Lord Shelsley's livings) spending a couple of nights there. As young Lord Shelsley was regarded by his cousin as the one of her guests most likely to be able to converse in French, Madeleine was confided to his escort. At dinner she found herself seated between him and the country parson. Lord Shelsley had lost his father six years before, and his mother when he was in his infancy. He had, consequently, been thrown upon the world at an early age. Naturally of a quick and versatile disposition, his premature initiation into society had tended to develop an unusual precocity of intellect, and to endow him with the manners of an older man. He spoke French with considerable fluency (an unusual accomplishment with Englishmen at that period), and entertained his pretty neighbour with accounts of London society and of his own and others' juvenile achievements, whether in feats of skill or conquests of the heart.

Late in the dinner, during a pause in his conversation, Madeleine observed that her other neighbour had remained silent during the whole meal, and taking pity upon him she ventured a remark in her not unpleasing though broken English:

"You must think me rude in not speaking to you sooner, but I am such a bad English scholar that I hesitate to speak except in my own language."

"I wish I could speak French as well as you do English," replied the parson. "You must have been some time in this country, I conclude?"

During the remainder of their stay, Lord Shelsley's attentions to Madeleine became very marked, and but for her increased prudence, derived from her late experiences, they might have resulted in some foolish avowal on his part. Perceiving his excessive assiduity in seeking her society, she wisely confided her fears to Mrs. Mowbray, who skilfully assisted her in eluding his pursuit and preventing any possibility of a *tête-à-tête*.

Madeleine, being in deep mourning, declined many pressing invitations to country balls during the winter.

Before Christmas M. l'Abbé Apedaile came to stay at Hartlip. He was frequently ailing, and Madeleine was very constant in her attendance upon him. During the month of his stay she had numerous opportunities of conversing with him, and received many valuable hints for her guidance. In after-days she looked back with a melancholy pleasure to that brief period of her life, treasuring up the advice which he had then given her. He departed before Candlemas, in order to supply the place of Mr. Southworth, the chaplain to the Poor Clares, who was called thence by business of a pressing nature. Although his health was so precarious, he insisted upon blessing the candles and saying a late Mass upon the feast of the Purification. Nevertheless the effort was too much for him, and he never rallied from the prostration brought on by this exertion.

At the end of the first week in February, the Rev. Mother Abbess of the Poor Clares summoned Mdlle. de S. Pol to what she foresaw would be the deathbed of the worthy abbé, but he lived for more than three weeks after her arrival, during which time she watched over him with unremitting devotion and solicitude.

"My child," said the old priest one day, when he appeared better than usual, "I have entrusted you to the care of Father Southworth and the Abbess of the Poor Clares, although I cannot legally make them your guardians."

Madeleine could scarcely restrain her tears.

"O my Father, you will not leave me. You will get better. God will not take you from me," she exclaimed in a paroxysm of despair.

"My poor child, you are the only tie which binds me still to this evil world. All the others are indeed broken, and but for you, my beloved ward, I could say from my

heart that I am detached from every earthly bond. You must help me to make a good end, by showing me that you, too, can resign yourself to God's holy will. We cannot fail to suffer, either *here* or *there*. This is God's law. The patient acceptance of suffering is the only way to peace, and, to use the words of the *Imitation*, 'Dost thou, my child, seek another way than this royal way, which is the way of the holy Cross?'"

"No, father, no; still I have no wish to live when you are gone: but tell me, do you think I am fitted for the religious life? for if God should deprive me of your care, I feel that my only safety will be in religion."

"I do not believe you have a vocation for that life, my child. I believe you will take a place in the world for which you are eminently fitted, for I can see that you are not wanting in judgment and discretion, and that experience is never lost upon you. Nevertheless, far be it from me to dissuade you from trying your vocation if, after mature deliberation and sound advice, you still incline to that opinion. But wait —wait some years. I am sure you are not called at present. Mrs. Mowbray will be a kind friend to you, and there are also others whom you have known, such as Mrs. Wakeman, whom you can visit. Promise me to pause, at least two or three years, before you try your vocation."

She rather unwillingly yielded to his importunities, and gave her promise. After that day she found but few opportunities of any definite conversation with him, for although there was no visible diminution in the clearness of his faculties, yet he became feebler and less eager for conversation. Father Southworth spent many hours with him both by day and night, and the Mother Abbess (who kept her enclosure) sent him kindly messages, together with such relishes as he might be able to partake of in his declining state. The old squire and his wife called daily to inquire, and the housekeeper from the Hall brought continual supplies of cooked game and other delicacies. The Bishop of the district happening to pass in the neighbourhood, and hearing of the old abbé's illness came and visited him. On the 25th of February he received the last sacraments, and died on the following day.

His end was rather sudden, but quite peaceful. Madeleine had understood that he had revived after being admin-

istered, and finding him better had driven out with Mrs. Mowbray to Worcester. On her return she discovered, to her bitter consternation and grief, that he had died in her absence. Father Southworth was by his bedside and read the parting commendation, bestowing upon him the last absolution. It was indeed a terrible wrench to poor Madeleine. A few days later he was buried in the Protestant burial-ground of Churchill, where a stone was erected bearing this inscription:

"Hic jacet corpus Rev^di. Georgii Apedaile, Sacerdotis Catholici, qui obiit Feb. 26, A.D. 1799, æt. 62. Olim Dunkerciæ. Requiescat in Pace. Amen."

CHAPTER VI.

ODDINGLEY.

THE village of Oddingley lay sequestered from any turnpike road, and was approached by lanes which even in pre-macadamite days were reputed exceptionally bad. The main thoroughfare, skirting the village, was a parish highway, conducting from Droitwich to Tibberton, and thence, by a circuitous course, to Worcester. Branching out of this in an easterly direction ran a lane, which, after traversing the village, conducted to Crowle and Pershore. Both roads, passing over the stiff red clay of the parish, partook of the natural character of the soil, which, after swallowing up the harder materials occasionally laid upon their surface, subsided into the deep ruts which constituted their normal condition. On the north-eastern side of the parish ran an old saltway, which in ancient times had served as the line of traffic from Wych towards Rycknield Street, and could be traced in a tolerably straight course through several parishes in the direction of the Avon; but even this venerable thoroughfare, though repaired from time to time with the blue limestone flanking its course, was rough and rutty in the extreme.

The village was made up of three or four farmhouses, a dozen cottages, and the Rectory, abutting on the lane, with a few more dwellings in the background, buried among the surrounding hedgerows and orchards. Although art had done but little for it, there was an essentially English air of homely rusticity about the place, which rendered it pleasant to contemplate. Nevertheless, not one of its homesteads

could boast of any pretensions to architectural beauty, since even those which retained some slight traces of black and white half-timbered construction were so patched up with modern brickwork, that nothing but the thatched roofs gave them any title to be regarded as picturesque. The Rectory was a hideous, whitewashed, brick structure, facing the lane, from which it was separated by a green wicket gate and a strip of turf, scarcely worthy of the humblest of suburban villas. But for its maze of hedgerow elms and thickly clustering orchards, the village might have borne but a mean and commonplace aspect, slightly savouring of that neglect which is the usual result of absenteeism, for it was one of its misfortunes that it possessed no resident squire. The old adage of "the nearer the church the farther from God" was scarcely verified in the topography of this somewhat godless hamlet, since the church lay nearly half a mile distant from the village, at a point where, after winding among fields and orchards, the lane bordered the flank of a wide valley. This basin (bounded by a low chain of hills crested with woodland) enclosed rich pastures, dotted here and there with wide-spreading gnarled oaks, survivors of the Forest of Feckenham. The little limestone church, with its quaint belfry, contained evidences which might warrant any modern ecclesiologist in assigning its date to the early part of the fifteenth century. On the southern slope, immediately below the churchyard, stood an old half-timbered structure, with an extensive farmyard and dovecot, which might possibly once have been the manor-house, but was then commonly known as the Church Farm. The lane which we have already described as the continuation of the principal village thoroughfare, descending an incline from the church, and following the bottom of the valley, passed a solitary farm-house at the extremity of the parish. Less than a mile beyond that isolated abode (the only habitation of which the smoke was visible from Oddingley churchyard), the road winding up a steep hill, was soon lost to view.

There were few prettier spots in the parish than this sloping ground whereon the grey mediæval church and the old black and white farmhouse lay snugly ensconced amidst a profusion of elms and apple trees. The farmyard, with its barns and dovecot, lay in a hollow, scooped out of the same slope beneath the house, which, having a southern aspect,

was sheltered from the north wind, and owned an air of comfort which any passer-by might be tempted to envy. Judging from the grass growing upon the lane, the passers-by were few and far between. Although, as has been mentioned, the way in question led to Crowle, and thence to various places of equal importance, there were better communications in other directions, and the farmers made little use of it for their produce. It served principally as an access to the outlying farm of Netherwood, which lay in the most remote quarter of this isolated parish. The extensive woods crowning the low hills to the east of the vale were looked upon as the wildest district in all the country round. They were supposed to be a last relic of the old forest days, and seem to have inherited all the romantic terrors of the ancient chase. At that time there was current a story of robbers inhabiting the wood, but whether they were poachers, burglars, or highwaymen was never very clearly understood. So rife were the rumours of the depredations of these outlaws, that few dared to venture through the woods, or even in their vicinity, in the dusk, and it was with a feeling of trepidation that any boy or girl from the village was ever despatched on an errand to Netherwood Farm after sun-down.

On a bright morning of June, in 1803, a girl of nineteen or twenty, or perhaps even more, might have been seen seated on a stile in the path leading to the churchyard, carelessly examining the contents of a basket which she was resting on the rail. She was dressed in a kind of Dolly-Varden costume, with a broad straw hat overshadowing her features, and looked eminently picturesque and attractive. It is true that she was no beauty, but her plump cheeks and slightly turned-up nose were not wanting in that youthful freshness which is always more or less attractive, combined, in this instance, with an expression of merry cordiality which could not fail to win the goodwill of any stranger. The stile was to the north of the churchyard, and separated the footpath from the lane. It was set back in the wide, overgrown hedge, so as to be hidden from persons coming along the road until close upon the spot. Hearing voices, she looked up, and saw at a short distance before her two of the parishioners of Oddingley, well known to her by sight. The one was a man approaching sixty, with aquiline features,

a reddish face, and a figure which, though not remarkably tall, was as upright as a lath, and possessed of that precision of gait and carriage which bespoke a lifelong habit of military drill. His companion, on the other hand, was a broad-shouldered, sturdy man, with good features and high-coloured cheeks. Just as they came within sight of the stile, whether through a wish to avoid the young lady, or having business in another direction, the latter exclaimed to his companion, as he turned back hastily:

"Well, Captain, I'd sooner have nothing to say to our Bonaparte—hang him! I've other business to attend to."

"Never say die, man; to lose is not to be vanquished in the war. You gave him a good one that time, though he did make you pay up. Come along, Barnett, and hear what he is prepared to offer."

"Hang the parson!" returned Barnett, "I'd willingly give him another which should settle him."

The young lady, who had overheard these not very complimentary remarks upon her brother-in-law, for such was the relationship in which Mr. Parker stood towards her, jumped down from the stile on which she was seated, and, ignoring the Captain's salute, turned to the left along the lane so as to avoid facing them. As she hurried along she could hear Barnett's remark:

"That is one of his folk; I should like to make a clean sweep of them all."

"I don't like the brood more than you do, John; but that's a dainty wench, and has a tidy ankle. I'm not a savage in my warfare, and am always for sparing the pretty women when I put a garrison to the sword."

Miss Nancy was not insensible to the flattery contained in the Captain's remark. Admissions of this kind coming from a foe are worth a thousand compliments from obsequious friends. As soon as they had crossed the stile, and were well out of hearing, she turned back, and began making up her mind to proceed homewards. While she was deliberating she heard a clatter of horses' hoofs. It was unusual to see equestrians in this outlandish region, it was consequently with some astonishment that she beheld the approach of a party of three, one of whom was a young lady, in the high-waisted unattractive riding gear of the period, somewhat

relieved by a high beaver hat, with an ostrich feather in it. They had been cantering, but pulled up to a walk before they reached the spot where Nancy was standing.

"I wonder whether we took the right turn, uncle?" inquired the young lady of her elder companion, a gentleman of sixty, dressed in clerical costume, with powdered hair and pigtail, and whose face showed signs of rustic health and contentment.

"I declare, Consy, you are precise and particular enough to be an old maid, although I oughtn't to say it in the present company, ought I, Consy? However, to spare your blushes, I'll make bold to ask this young lady whether we are in the right road or no?"

Nancy, who heard all this, blushed even deeper crimson than Miss Constance on her nag, and would have sprung back over the stile into the field and vanished if she had dared.

"Beg your pardon, my young lady," pursued the Squire, addressing Nancy, "but will you be so good as to tell me whether we are right for Crowle?"

"Oh, yes, sir; quite straight."

"Let us see," continued the gentleman, who in reality knew the country as well as she did, but was never loath to converse with a pretty damsel, "where does Captain Evans live?"

"Down yonder, in the black and white house you'll pass below the church."

"Yes, yes; and the clergyman—what is his name?"

"My brother-in-law, Mr. Parker."

"Ah, indeed; your brother-in-law? So glad to make your acquaintance. Sorry we have never met before. My name is Pendrell, and this is my niece, Miss Constance Pendrell. You must come and see us at Hallowcliffe. Mr. Greenwood, allow me to present you to Mr. Parker's sister."

"My brother-in-law is at the church," said Nancy, not knowing what to say, and feeling very shy.

"At the church? Ah, well, another day we must call; we have not time, I'm afraid now," he said, looking at his watch. "Out-of-the-way place for you to stay in—very; all sorts of queer stories about Oddingley, you know, and the Trench woods, said to be infested by robbers and the Lord knows what."

Nancy laughed, and looked so pretty in her merry mood as to tempt him to go on with his banter.

"Nothing like being used to it," he continued. "I suppose you never hear of anything of the sort here? 'Distance lends enchantment to the view.' Ghosts and hobgoblins are only terrible when seen through the magnifying-glass of space, eh? *You* are not frightened by such bogles, at all events, I can see?"

"No; my sister is the only one who ever seems afraid of robbers and such things. She gets nervous sometimes. It is enough to make her so, to live in this place, I am sure! Never was such a wicked place! I wish George could get away from it, or I am sure it will be the death of him, and all of us."

"He does not get on very well with his parishioners, I am told?" returned Mr. Pendrell.

"Not likely, such a bad set as they are. They have no more religion amongst them than pagans. Many of them never come to church. I believe they would almost murder us all, if they dared."

"He is too hard upon them with the tithe, they say."

"Oh, sir, you don't know how he has tried to humour them, and all he has done; but they are worse than Turks and heathens. He only sticks for his rights after all. A clergyman must live, and he has nothing else to live upon. It is very hard upon Mary—very hard. I'm sure papa would never have let her come to such a place if he had known."

"Well, I'm very sorry for your sister," rejoined Mr. Pendrell in a sympathetic tone. "You must bring Mrs. Parker over to see us at Hallowcliffe.* It is only two miles off. Mrs. Pendrell would have called, but one of our horses is lame. Be sure you give my message, and remember my name —Mr. Pendrell of Hallowcliffe."

The other two, who had ridden forward some twenty or thirty paces while this conversation was going on, amused at their companion's long halt, laughed heartily when he rejoined them. The young lady, Miss Constance Pendrell, looked round and nodded to Nancy as she was riding off; but this somewhat supercilious act of courtesy on her part

* The Saxon name was *Hades-score*, signifying consecrated bank or hallowed cliff.

was not enough to obliterate the impression made upon the girl's mind by their laughter, which she determined must have been provoked at her expense. This was doubtless far from the truth, for their amusement was caused by the quaintness of their companion in conversing with all who came across his path, curious to learn everything about everybody.

Poor Nancy coloured up as she reflected on her recent conversation, thinking she must have made some foolish speech which had awakened their hilarity. After standing for a few minutes in a state of mental petrifaction at the thought of her imaginary folly, she proceeded homewards towards the village. She had not gone many steps when she met a respectably-clad young woman, who accosted her, asking the road to Captain Evans' house.

"Straight as you can go," she replied, "until you pass the church, and then turn to the right."

"Perhaps, miss, you knows the Captain?"

"No, indeed; why do you ask?"

"Well, miss, he be a magistrate, and my husband have done some work for him since he come from Norton, and there bain't a many as knows him in these parts. Well, miss, they do say as he be suspected of getting into some trouble along with Pritchard, and I thought if you knew the Captain, you'd speak a word for me."

Saying this, the poor woman burst into tears, and Nancy was at a loss how to comfort her, knowing the terms on which her brother-in-law stood with the Captain.

"What is your husband's name?" she asked.

"Richard Hemming."

"I don't think I can help you, but if you will come to the parsonage, my brother-in-law will perhaps be able to advise you;" so saying, she persuaded the poor woman to follow her to the Rectory, where she made her sit down in the kitchen and await Mr. Parker's return.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STOLEN TRINKETS.

THERE was something in the beautiful but careworn countenance of Elizabeth Hemming which interested Nancy in her favour, and the poor woman was equally attracted by the kindness and sympathy manifested by the young lady. Having seated her in the kitchen, with her sister's permission she offered her some refreshment. Mrs. Parker, who had been in the front parlour teaching her little daughter Mary, came in with the child to visit the stranger.

"You see, ma'am," said the poor woman, "he've worked for Captain Evans, so maybe he'd be more ready to help me in screening him than the gentleman at Hallowcliffe, who knows nothing on him."

"What has he done?" inquired Mrs. Parker, who was then considerably under thirty; a matured likeness of her sister, but with a more demure and serious address and manner.

"I fear he've got into some trouble along with some of his chums, ma'am; but there be no real harm in the man. I'm sure he's as kind a husband as need to be."

"Where is your husband?"

"That is more than I know, ma'am. He might have gone to Norton, down by Eckington, where he was reared, or somewhere out that way. The constable that came to Wych to inquire after him this morning was from Tibberton. They say that Evelench farmhouse was broken into last night, and

a lot of jewels stolen from a foreign lady who is dwelling there. Do you know where that lies, ma'am?"

"I know the road to Tibberton. If the robbery were there, had you not better seek the justice who sent the Tibberton constable?"

"That would do no good, ma'am. It 'ud only be casting suspicion on him if I were to go and plead for him with a stranger; but the Captain has been kind to him and would be disposed to screen him."

"He is a bad man," returned Mrs. Parker, with some show of resentment; "a wicked godless man, and will do your husband no good. I am sure I don't wish to be uncharitable, but I am only speaking the truth and doing what is right when I warn you, my good woman, against placing yourself under an obligation to *that* man. Besides, what could he do for you? 'Tis plain that if they catch your husband they'll take him before the county justices and not before a borough magistrate. If you like to wait till Mr. Parker returns, he will advise you what to do; but you really must not go to this Captain; as you value your own respectability, you must not, indeed."

The poor woman felt very uneasy, as she was convinced in her own mind that Captain Evans was more likely than any one else to befriend her in her dilemma. She, nevertheless, resigned herself to tarry patiently for the return of the parson.

The latter, who has already been introduced to the reader, met his wife in the front parlour in a state of mental perturbation which did not forebode favourably for the success of Mrs. Hemming's errand.

"God knows," he said, "I have done my duty, fearless of consequences. Do what one may, these ignorant, illiterate boors will never be convinced."

"But don't you think, George, you might yield a little?"

"Give them an inch and they'll take an ell," he replied. "Why, what do you think happened to-day? The Captain proposed, on behalf of the whole lot of them, to accept my first proposal of a composition at £150 a year. I thought this came with a bad grace from that fire-eating adventurer, as he was the author of the whole resistance."

"Then you have won the day, George, and have actually forced them to capitulate?"

"Well; yes, so far."

"Then why are you so put out about it all?"

"This is not all. Remember, I have been put to a tremendous expense in building that barn."

"Yes, but we have not been much out of pocket, George. You owned yourself that the tithe in kind has brought you in more than what you would have gained by compounding."

"Well, darling, that is just it, and now they begin to see this and want to compound."

"Let them, George; it will save us a world of annoyance and wretchedness."

"I am ready. It is not my fault, but it is only fair that, after putting me to the expense of erecting that tithe barn, they should pay me the cost of it—that is all I asked, namely £150, for what I have been out of pocket in building the barn and collecting the tithe. Surely this was fair enough, and, of course, that curmudgeon refused it."

"And so matters are to go on in the same wretched way, George. Oh! how I wish we could get an exchange of livings; this is, indeed, a state of perpetual misery and terror."

"Come, Mary, don't be down in the mouth. For my part, though I may be put out for the moment with the impertinence of these godless, under-bred, illiterate clowns, yet, in the long run, I rather enjoy fighting them, especially when I see symptoms of their yielding. Their offer to-day was, as you say, a capitulation, but I won't have such half-submission. I'll bring them down on their haunches before they have done. They have insulted me too much to be forgiven easily. John Barnett is afraid to show himself, I fancy, for he did not come."

"Yes, George, I know they have behaved very badly, and I feel it all as much as you do—even more; but still," she pursued, with a deep sigh, "we must forgive our enemies."

"I know all that," he returned with some impatience. "I suppose I must allow God's minister to be kicked with impunity by a miscreant like that Barnett, and so cast dishonour upon my cloth and bring it into contempt. Does not S. Paul say, 'Let every soul be subject to the higher powers, and they that resist the power purchase damnation to themselves?' and as I preached to them a few Sundays since (only they never heed my sermons, even when they

have the grace to come to church) from that most appropriate text, 'So also the Lord ordained that they who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel.'"

"Yes, indeed, George, but I wish you would try, just a little, to humour them."

"Oh! darling, what a time-server you are. I never knew any good come of compromise. I have always stuck to my colours, and, so help me God, will stick to them to the end. I dare say it will all come right. The harm has come through pluralities. The last two parsons were non-residents, and, there being no squire in the parish, these farmers have had it all to themselves, and a godless life they've been leading, not giving a thought to heaven or hell."

"How sad! I wish we could awaken a true saving faith in their hearts. It is, indeed, most awful to think of. George, there's a poor woman waiting in the kitchen to see you. Her name is Hemming, and her husband is a worthless fellow, I fear, who is suspected of some robbery. She says he has worked for Captain Evans, and I stopped her going to the Church Farm, whither she was bound in hopes of getting the Captain to screen her husband from the constable."

"Couldn't have gone to a more likely man. 'Birds of a feather,' you know. He is a proper man to befriend a scoundrel.'

"Yes: but, George, she is a very tidy, nice-looking young woman, whatever her husband may be. And I do not like throwing her into such evil company. I should like you just to see her. You can hear her story and advise her."

In no very good humour he followed his wife to the kitchen, and listened to a repetition of Elizabeth Hemming's tale.

"A foreign lady at Tibberton!" he exclaimed; "why, bless me, that cannot be the young French lady I met at Stourgrove four years ago, for she was at Churchill. Do you remember that I wanted you to call upon her, Mary, and you have forgotten all about it?"

"We have no means of reaching such an out-of-the-way place, and, without horses, what can we do?"

"That reminds me," said Nancy, who was standing by the open door holding the child's hand, "that soon after I left you at the church, George, I met a riding party who stopped and asked me to direct them on their way. The

gentleman asked after you, desiring his compliments, and told me his name was Pendrell of Hallowcliffe."

"It would have been more civil had they called on us," said Mrs. Parker. "They know we have no carriage."

"Yes, Mary, but you ought to call. We can walk over there across the fields. As to a carriage, it would be very little use, for in winter time, when most needed, our roads are almost impassable, you know. We will walk over to Hallowcliffe while Nancy is with us, and pay our respects to the Pendrells."

"They will be sure to ask us to dinner," returned his wife, in a confidential undertone to her husband, "and I have not a decent gown to wear!"

"It will be time enough to think of that when we are asked. But about this poor person here," pursued the parson after this digression. "Mrs. ——; what is your name, good woman?"

"Hemming, your honour."

"What is it you want, my good woman?"

"I want some one to befriend me, sir," she returned, unable to restrain her tears. "I believe, your honour, as he means well, but he've been badly reared like, and don't properly know right from wrong, as he ain't altogether responsible as they say. I don't blame him, poor fellow, for he be a good husband in the main,—very good!"

"But what can I do for you, my good woman? You don't want the justices to bind him over to keep the peace with you?"

"Lor', no! your honour; I want some one to screen him and yet to give him a good chiding that may cause him to mend his ways."

"But you said he has been implicated in some felony—in this burglary at Tibberton?"

"No, your honour; I never said that, so help me God. I said as there had been this robbery of the foreign lady's jewels, but I'm almost as sure as I stand here that my poor Dick can have had no hand in it. It is not likely, as having work on hand at the present time, he should go and risk his neck. Perhaps, as your honour seems to know somewhat of this 'ere foreign lady, I'm thinking, sir, as you might

speak a word on his behalf, poor fellow, or give me a letter to the lady."

"I never said I knew her; but I'll tell you what, my good woman. Instead of going on a wild-goose chase to this upstart captain, who can't do you a farthing o' good in the matter, why not trudge off to Tibberton, and see the lady for yourself? You may tell her that I sent you—the rector of Oddingley, mind, and then bring me word whether she is the same lady I met at Mr. Shelsley's some years ago."

The parson's suggestion was mainly prompted by a kind of latent jealousy of Captain Evans' influence in the parish. That worthy, coarse and vulgar as he was, aped in some measure the position of a kind of squire in this squireless locality, profiting by his office of borough magistrate to play the part of triton amongst the minnows. The poor woman's main object was to see the French lady, but she felt timid at going alone to a foreigner, and thought to have persuaded the Captain to accompany her. She was loath to abandon her visit to the latter, but could not summon moral courage to fly in the face of the parson's injunctions, especially when Mr. Parker conducted her to the lane and pointed her the way to Tibberton.

The road ran in a southerly direction, almost parallel to the lane passing the Captain's house, and, although at some distance from the latter, it nevertheless abutted on a portion of the farm which he occupied. In those days the rutty roadway was bordered by broad belts of turf, overshadowed by tall overgrown hedges. To the right of the lane lay some recently enclosed common, known as Oddingley Heath, or the Hulls, from its commanding position. On the apex of this high ground grew two stately elms, called Od and Dingley, marking the burial-places of the two giants, to whose legend allusion has been made. Since the period to which we refer, the rural seclusion of the district has been interfered with by the canal, but in 1803 the mile between the villages of Oddingley and Tibberton was as solitary as a road could be. With the exception of one or two thatched hovels, erected by squatters on the common, Elizabeth Hemming passed no habitation of note until she reached the Plough Inn, at Tibberton, an old-fashioned rural hostelry, with a thatched roof, black and white half-timbered walls,

pierced by good-sized casements, with diamond panes, and fronted by some old gnarled elms or hornbeams, trimmed into comely shapes, overshadowing benches and tables, inviting passers-by to rest and partake of the ale and the cider wherein mine host notified his license to traffic, under the good old sign of "God speed the Plough."

It was not unusual to see these benches tenanted by convivial farmers or drovers even at an early hour, and so she need not have been surprised to hear voices as she approached the inn. On the present occasion there were four or five men seated at a table, with horn drinking-cups and a huge tankard of ale before them, and two or three of them with long clay pipes in their mouths.

"Come, gentlemen, fill a bumper, and prepare to drink the health of a certain friend of ours left-handed. Was ever such a sneaking, ill-conditioned dog! After we had given in to his outrageous demands, and eaten humble-pie, as it were! I have been reading in the Journal about Bonaparte, who is always making fresh demands upon his vanquished foes; no sooner have they conceded one point than he seeks something new. Our friend may well be called the Bonaparte of Oddingley, hang him! I believe, however, that his wanting to charge us for the barn was only a plea after all, since that he finds his tithe in kind pay him treble what he got by the old composition."

"I'll be sworn that's it," cried Barnett.

"He don't preach so bad, if he'd only be a bit more neighbourly," observed a good-natured looking man with a rubicund complexion, who was known as Ned Hurcourt.

"Hang him! I never cares to hear a fellow preach as doesn't practise," said a strong, fine-grown young man of three or four and twenty, with sharp intelligent features, but an expression of countenance not altogether prepossessing.

"You need not tell us that, Thomas, for I never saw you at church in my life, excepting for the parish meetings. I don't know what you does hold to, either in preaching or practising," retorted Hurcourt.

"It's all gammon with them parsons; that's my thinking."

"Come, come, Tom Clewes, we are no Jacobins; we are all Church and State men here," quoth the Captain. "Tis the Whig parson that's the Jacobin, for he was old

Jock of Norfolk's electioneering agent before he was handed over to our young lord's trustees. I believe he'd finished up his education as a *domine* in the meantime, the birching usher in a school, and so thought to birch us all round, as he did the boys. Methinks, Thomas, you'd come in for a fair share of his rod, if he had his way."

Such was the conversation, of which a few scraps fell upon the ears of the poor woman as she passed the public-house, sidling as close as she could under the opposite hedge, in order to escape the observation of the convivial party.

"Halloo! young woman," cried the Captain, who was a general and rather promiscuous admirer of the fair sex; "whither are you bound along this road? Good-morrow to you, mistress."

Elizabeth Hemming's first impulse was to ignore this somewhat free and unceremonious salutation, but on second thoughts, being ignorant of the road to Evelench, she thought she might as well profit by the opportunity of currying favour with the Captain; so turning round with a blushing face, she curtsied to that worthy, saying, "Please, your honour, perhaps you could kindly tell me my road to Evelench farm?"

"Evelench, my good woman? What do you want at Evelench?" inquired the Captain suspiciously.

"They say, sir, there is a foreign lady living there."

"Halloo! perhaps you can throw some light on the matter of this robbery, mistress. Who is this foreign lady they talk about?" he inquired, turning to the landlord, who had just come out with a fresh jug of ale.

"Well, your worship, you mean she as have lost her jewels in this robbery last night? She was one of them French refugees, I've heard say, as was living over yonder by Squire Mowbray's, and has took lodgings with Farmer Lloyd. She has the parlour and a couple of rooms all to herself and her maid. The priest have been over more than once from Boughfield, I've heard say."

"I was about to step up to the farm myself," said the Captain, "to see how it happened."

"Well," pursued the landlord, "they came in through the parlour window most like; but there was no damage done to the casements. Maybe it was left open. Those chaps round the Trenches might ha' done it, but they do suspect

the Wych folk has had a hand in it. The constable was telling me as he'd been down to Wych after a wheelwright there, as they do suspect."

The poor woman stood by in a state of agony whilst he was speaking, but at length summoning courage, she again curtsied to the Captain, saying, "Your worship, I think it is Captain Evans I have the honour of speaking to? If I might make so bold, I should be glad to have a word with your honour."

"Halloo! what is it, mistress? I never refuse anything to a pretty wench," he said, rising, and winking to his comrades as he stepped forward.

As soon as they were beyond the hearing of the jovial company, Mrs. Hemming mentioned her errand to Captain Evans, as she had already done to Mr. Parker.

"So you are married to that dare-devil scoundrel, Hemming? Why, he'd kill his own father if you'd pay him for it. I like a plucky chap, who fears neither man nor devil. He is a tidy fellow, and might do us a service some day if things don't mend in our parish. Well, I'll do my best. What is it you want at Evelench, my good woman?"

"To see the lady. Master Parker thought I'd better see her."

"Parker! what the dickens does he know about it? Have you been prating to our Oddingley parson about it?"

"I was on my road to your worship's house when I fell in with his people."

"And he tried to stop your coming to me, I'll be sworn?"

"Well, yes, your honour."

"He is a bad 'un. Don't you go back to him again, or I'll not befriend your husband any more, and he may take his chance."

"I thought, your honour, the lady might do me a kind turn, and help me to screen Dick from the constable."

"If you'd brought her back the jewels she might. Ten to one he had a hand in it. Bring her back the jewels, and it will all be hushed up. I'll see to that, my good wench."

"You think so, your honour? Well, that's the very matter I wanted to ask your worship's counsel about."

"What do you mean, mistress? Have you got the jewels?"

"I can't tell your honour; that's just it. The constable

came to our house this morning, and I hain't seen Dick since daybreak; but after the constable was gone I 'lighted on some trinkets, which some one must have stuffed in the oven behind some straw. I can't think as it was Dick, or he'd have told me; but it might be one of his chums."

"Let me see what you have."

The woman produced from her pocket a blue kerchief, which she proceeded to untie, and revealed an amethyst necklace, a diamond ring, and a species of tiara set with pearls and sapphires.

"Umph! and what do you propose doing with these trinkets?" inquired the Captain.

"I thought, your honour, of taking them to the lady, and asking her if they be hers."

"But supposing, my good wench, they *are* hers, but only a part of what she has lost. What do you think will happen then? The constable will have you up on suspicion, and your husband will be convicted of burglary, and strung up at Red Hill—not a doubt of it."

"Never, your honour; they wouldn't be so wicked."

"But, after all, my good woman, you don't know but what your husband stole ten times as many as you have there. If they miss any they will be sure to suspect him of having purloined them all."

"Well, your honour, Hemming having done a sight of work for your worship, I thought as you'd be sure to stand by him; I did indeed. But I don't know what's to be done. We shall be ruined."

"Say that you picked them up on the road."

"That would be a lie, your honour, for they were in my house sure enough."

"Well, I tell you what will happen if you say *that*. They will say at once that Hemming has stolen them, and if they miss any, as I suspect they will, he will go to prison, and have a good chance of being swung for a burglar."

"Then your honour may take them, for I'll have no more to do with them. Your honour may do as you please, but I have not the face to go and tell the lady a lie about them."

"Look here, my good woman; if I take them to the lady, it must be on the condition that you never say a word more about them to any mortal soul, and never breathe a word of

having found them, unless to tell your husband that you handed them to me. You may as well do that. Send him to me at once. But promise to keep your counsel."

"Yes, your honour."

"Well, on that condition, I'll stand your friend, and keep Dick from swinging this time. Now, harkee, cut across those fields to the right, and get into the Oakley Road, and so back to Wych by Yew Tree Lane as quickly as you can without stopping anywhere or blabbing a word to any one—dost heed me, wench? And as soon as Dick comes home send him to me at the farm without a moment's delay. You may tell him I'll stand his friend."

Having exacted this promise from Elizabeth Hemming, he proceeded up the shady lane leading to Evelench farmhouse.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAPTAIN'S VISIT TO EVELENCH.

THREE years had told favourably upon Madeleine de S. Pol, and had matured the beauties and graces already so conspicuous in the girl of fifteen. She had spent a portion of that period with the Wyniatts at their houses in Warwickshire and Gloucestershire, but the beautiful and fascinating Mrs. Mowbray herself was her principal friend. During the previous winter she had been with Mr. and Mrs. Mowbray at Bath, where she had frequented the assemblies and been admired by the men of rank and fashion congregated at that famous watering-place. Her kind hosts proposed that she should accompany them to town, to enjoy the pleasures of a London season, where she would see society on a more extended scale than in the provincial city; but circumstances occurred which prevented the fulfilment of this project. For several years she had continued without tidings of any of her father's kin, and had come to the conclusion that they had all fallen victims to the revolutionary fury. It was with considerable surprise that she learnt from an old French abbé living in exile at Bath, that her father's cousin, Madame de Francheville, was alive, and had been making such inquiries to discover her whereabouts as were compatible with the disturbed relations of the two countries. The abbé informed her that he had already notified her wellbeing, and dilated upon her good looks in a letter he had contrived to send by private hand to an intimate friend of Madame de Francheville in Paris. This was during the early days of her sojourn at Bath. Some months later, before she left it, her cousin had managed to communicate with her by letter, and also to send her special messages through a confidential

friend. The gist of her missives was to induce her to take the earliest opportunity of returning to France, in order to recover as much of the family estates as had not been finally alienated, and also (but this was only hinted at in the letter to Madeleine, although more openly revealed to the confidential friend) to prepare her to receive the addresses of her son, Alphonse de Francheville, and thus to pave the way for a family alliance which would once more revive the fallen fortunes of the house of S. Pol, by uniting it with that of De Francheville. Her English education had not in the least eradicated her strong national sympathies, and amidst all her triumphs and perplexities she looked forward to the day when she should be able to resume her place as châtelaine of the old domain of her ancestors, and nothing was further from her thoughts than to renounce her country or finally to expatriate herself. Madame de Francheville's communications were therefore very welcome to her. They came opportunely, too, in some respects. Amongst her numerous admirers at Bath, the one to whom she gave the preference was the young Lord Shelsley, whom she had first met in Worcestershire. It is true that the difference of religion might have presented a formidable obstacle to any prospect of a future union between them, had such a question been mooted at the outset; but they met at public assemblies and routs, and danced and talked together, without giving a thought to the future. The handsome and fascinating young man was apparently as much captivated by the lovely foreigner as she could be by his attentions. The flirtation became marked, and led to Mrs. Mowbray's remonstrating seriously with Madeleine, who consequently became more cautious. It seems her increased reticence provoked Lord Shelsley to more daring advances, and he went so far on one occasion, on the eve of a journey to London, as to declare his passion. The girl had put a restraint upon herself, and in obedience to the cautions which she had received, alluded to the insuperable barrier caused by the differences of their faith. He made light of this, and jokingly avowed his readiness to become a Papist for love of her. She took his words more seriously than he intended, and promised to pray for his conversion. He left the next day, but she remembered her promise. What was her consternation when, only a fortnight

later, the papers mentioned the rumour of Lord Shelsley's engagement to the daughter of a Whig peer! This news arrived just ten days before the Mowbrays' intended departure for London, whereupon Madeleine resolved she would not incur the risk of meeting one who had so cruelly trifled with her affections. She felt the wound all the more acutely, in that she strove to conceal it from those around her. Mrs. Mowbray had, indeed, frequently told her that a marriage with Lord Shelsley was out of the question, unless she was prepared for a mixed marriage and its deplorable consequences and painful complications. Madeleine had scarcely dared to avow her hopes of his conversion, but this was the secret fuel with which she had nourished the flame in her own heart. Now that the truth burst upon her, she grieved that she had not spoken more explicitly to Mrs. Mowbray, and used greater caution in the whole matter. Notwithstanding all her endeavours, she could not obliterate all signs of her disappointment from her countenance, and Mrs. Mowbray had far too much discernment to fail in penetrating her secret. When Madeleine proposed to write to her old friend Mrs. Wakeman, offering her a visit, she seconded her project. The reply, which came after a few days' delay, mentioned that she was then absent from Pershull on a visit to some relatives, but that in a few weeks' time she should be glad to entertain her at Little Malvern Court. Madeleine was shy of presenting herself at Boughfield or Foxcote, where she might be questioned about her motives for shirking the London season, so she wrote private letters to the Abbess of the Poor Clares and Father Southworth, begging the latter to find her some temporary lodging where she could remain with her maid, unnoticed by the neighbourhood, during the few weeks preceding her visit to Mrs. Wakeman. Evelench was a farm which had been bequeathed by a Miss Wyntour to a religious society toward the close of the seventeenth century, and had been secretly and honourably held in trust for that society, during the era of persecution, by the Mowbray family. It lay isolated from the rest of their property, and bordered upon the parish of Oddingley, which had also been the possession of the Wyntours of Hodington, from whom it was purchased by the Shelsleys during the latter half of the seventeenth century.

At the period of our narrative, the house at Evelench retained a good deal of the old timber construction, and was highly picturesque, both in itself and with reference to its admirable situation on the summit of a well-timbered knoll, with rich meadows and orchards sloping down from it in every direction. The gabled façade fronted upon the fold-yard, from which it was, however, separated by a garden and low wall, as well as by the road forming the approach. The back of the house, facing toward Oddingley, opened upon a garden and a spacious orchard. Madeleine's sitting-room and bedroom, which were sufficiently isolated from the other chambers to ensure perfect privacy, all looked out in that direction.

The casket of jewels which she had brought with her from Bath contained many of the trinkets which had been bequeathed to her by her mother, and some which had continued time out of mind in the S. Pol family. She valued them more than any of her moveables, less on account of their intrinsic worth than as family heirlooms which could not be replaced. On the day but one preceding the robbery she had examined them, and subsequently locked up the case which contained them in a cupboard in the sitting-room, and stowed away the key in her bedroom. On the day previous to the occurrences in our last chapter she had been on the point of opening the box, and had gone upstairs for the key of the cupboard, when the unexpected arrival of Father Southworth had prevented the fulfilment of her intention. Her consternation was great when on the morning to which our narrative refers her maid came and asked her whether she had left the cupboard open on the previous evening and had failed to hasp the window, for that both were wide open.

"And my casket of trinkets, is it safe?"

"No, there is nothing left in the cupboard but some packets of letters."

Mrs. Lloyd declared that she missed some poultry from the yard, and the whole place was in consternation. The parish constable was quickly apprised of it, and sent off to the most handy magistrate at Wych. Suspicions immediately fell upon the Trench Wood and Crowle gang, who were supposed to be at the bottom of all the robberies in the neighbourhood. It was, however, well known that this

mysterious and ubiquitous confraternity had certain ramifications in Wych itself, and Hemming, the carpenter and wheelwright, was supposed to be in league with them. For this reason, after obtaining the necessary authority, the constable called at Richard Hemming's house in S. Nicholas, Droitwich, to ascertain whether he had been absent from home during the previous night. Hence Elizabeth Hemming's peregrination as soon as she discovered the evidences of her husband's participation in the crime.

Madeleine had some difficulty in procuring the services of a lad, whom she despatched with a note to Father Southworth, recounting her misfortunes, an event which was all the more annoying as she felt that it must in all probability result in the secret of her residence at Evelench becoming known to those from whom she had been desirous of concealing it.

As she had been anxiously expecting Father Southworth's arrival, on the visitor being announced she concluded that it was the good priest from Churchill. Captain Evans was ushered into her neatly-furnished parlour, and that weather-beaten old truant of seventy was bewildered at the discovery of such an elysium amidst the wilds of Tibberton and Oddingley. The taste displayed in the arrangement of the room was nothing in comparison with the rare beauty of the gem which it enshrined in the person of Madeleine de S. Pol.

The graceful maiden of nineteen had risen to receive her visitor, and the look of surprise and confusion upon her countenance when, in place of the priest whom she had been expecting, she beheld a perfect stranger, only added to the picturesque beauty of her expression. There was a rough, soldier-like politeness about the old man, who, however doubtful his origin and early education, had acquired a certain habit of courtesy in the mess-room during his thirty years' military career. It is true that, being of an irascible temper, he was wont to give vent to his rage in oaths and imprecations of the most unseemly kind, but nevertheless towards ladies he was rarely wanting in that old-fashioned gallantry which he clung to as a tradition of his younger days. On entering the room he made a formal bow and hesitated for a moment, perhaps in hopes of mustering some of the few French terms with which he had become

acquainted in the course of his campaigns, to address the lady, in case she should be unable to converse in English.

"To whom have I the honour of speaking?" she said in good vernacular, after returning his salutation.

"Captain Evans is my name, madam," he replied, "and I must crave your pardon for my intrusion. I am an old soldier and a magistrate, living in this neighbourhood, and have heard of the robbery that has taken place, of which, madam, I believe you are the unfortunate victim."

"Yes, sir, it is indeed a most unfortunate occurrence, for the loss is to me an irreparable one. The trinkets belonged to my mother, and I valued them for her sake far more than for their intrinsic worth; no money can repair such a loss."

"Were there many?" he asked.

"A whole casketful."

"Can you describe any of them?"

"Oh, yes. I told the constable as far as I could remember; but I have since written down a list, to the best of my recollection, of all the contents of the box, describing them briefly. I will show you."

"Pardon me, madam; was there a necklace?"

"There or four."

"Of what stones?"

"One of diamonds, another diamonds and emeralds, and a third with amethysts."

"Amethysts? What coloured stones are they?"

"Bluish violet colour. Mine were particularly fine ones, and the settings very graceful, of our old Louis Quinze pattern, and a locket to match, containing my mother's hair."

"Quite right, madam," he said, chuckling; "and had you any kind of ornament for the hair, you know—a sort of head-piece, so to say?"

"I had a tiara of diamonds, and another of pearls and sapphires."

"Pearls and sapphires, eh?" he rejoined. "Let me see, madam; what colour are sapphires?"

"Blue: mine are deep blue, set *au jour* as we say, so that the light shines through them."

"Quite right, madam, quite right; and had you any rings?"

"Rings, oh yes; I think ten or twelve at least. One with alternate rubies and diamonds mixed was perhaps the finest, and also a very beautiful sapphire and diamond ring, worth a great deal I was told. It belonged to my maternal ancestor, and was given her by Madame de la Vallière. Then there were three diamond rings; one of them set *au jour*, and two with brilliants in gold settings."

"At all events you had a diamond ring, madam. Look here," he said, pulling the blue kerchief from his coat-pocket and opening it on the table; "were these some of your ornaments?"

"Ah!" she exclaimed, looking at them. "Yes; yes, indeed, that is my tiara and necklace, and also my diamond ring. Where did they come from? Have you got the rest?"

"They were found by a poor woman who handed them to me," he replied. "The thieves may have dropped them, you know, in their flight. Have you taken any steps to trace the rest to the jewellers and pawnbrokers, and such-like, for the thieves are certain to endeavour to sell them perhaps a long way from here? 'Twould be worth your while, madam, if I might be so bold as to advise you in the matter, to get a Bow Street officer down from London."

"I am quite ignorant of all such things, sir. Being a foreigner, I know nothing of the English laws. I am quite at a loss. I am expecting a friend to-day from Churchill, to whom I sent to come and advise me. Unfortunately Mr. Mowbray and Mr. Wyniatt, whom I know, are both absent. I shall indeed be very grateful, sir, for any advice and assistance you can give me.'

The old soldier's susceptible heart was already completely captivated by the attractive manners and extreme beauty of Madeleine.

"I am a magistrate for the borough of Wych, but not for the county, you know, madam; but you may trust to me to do my utmost to recover your property. Let me see; was this the window they entered?"

"Yes, sir; and this is the cupboard where my jewel-box was stowed, and which was securely locked, as I thought."

"The window is not broken."

"I fear it may have been left unhasped; but the cupboard was locked."

"Men in the garden might easily see you through that window after dusk."

"Yes, so I have been thinking; and indeed one night, a short time since, while I was examining my trinkets, I heard a rustling of the leaves, and immediately went up to the window and closed it."

"Ha, the deuce, madam; that lets the cat out of the bag. No doubt the rascals saw where you hoarded your treasure, and sought it at their leisure; not a doubt of it! Well, madam, I presume you would be willing to offer a reward if it should be thought advisable?"

"Certainly, sir. I would give almost anything, in reason, to get them back. I don't know how much I can afford, though."

"Well, madam, one or two hundred pounds would probably be enough."

"Four or five hundred say, sir, rather than lose them!"

"Too much, too much, by George! for the thieves. Well, up to three say; will you give me, as I believe they say in your country, *carte blanche* up to three hundred? If necessary, I'll send up for a Bow Street runner to help me in clearing up this mystery. But leave it all to me, madam, and I'll do my best; *that* I will, my dear young lady."

While the Captain was gallantly employed in placing his services at the disposal of the beautiful young foreigner, Father Southworth was announced.

In those semi-penal days the costume of a Catholic priest was distinguished by a significant absence of everything which we consider clerical, and yet, despite the brown coat with metal buttons, the frilled shirt, buff breeches and gaiters, there was nevertheless an unmistakeably venerable air about the old man as he doffed his wide-brimmed beaver, politely inclining his head to the occupants of the apartment. His white hair, gathered behind his head in a *cue* or pigtail, contributed to the old-fashioned respectability of his appearance.

"Mr. Southworth," said Madeleine, presenting her new guest to the Captain. "This gentleman is a magistrate," she pursued, turning to the priest, "and has kindly undertaken to assist me in recovering my jewels; indeed he has already brought back three of them which the robbers had dropped

on the road, and which I much treasure, especially the amethyst necklace of my dearest mother's."

Captain Evans explained how the thieves must have effected their entrance, and did his best to ingratiate himself with the priest, as he conceived himself to have done already with the young lady.

"Ha!" said he, "I've known those of your cloth, sir, beyond the seas, both in Spain and Trinidad, and I only wish our parsons were one half as self-denying as the Papist priests I've fallen in with in my day. We've got a Tartar in my parish yonder who thinks of nothing in the world but feathering his own nest and making money out of us all. They only care for their families; while your Papists that I have met with look on their flocks as their families. That's the difference, by gad it is!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE RECOVERY OF THE SPOIL.

THE neighbouring justices and parish constables bestirred themselves but leisurely concerning the robbery, and though a reward was offered for the apprehension of the thieves, nothing came of their endeavours. The Captain kept his counsel touching Richard Hemming, through whom he believed himself possessed of a readier solution to the problem than could be anticipated from even the skilful search of a Bow Street officer. The old soldier had a knack of lording it over those with whom he came in contact. All his life long he had possessed a power of influencing others. This it was which, in his younger days, had enabled him to recruit with such success as to win him his commission in the 89th regiment of foot. This, too, was the secret of his ruling the roost among his fellow-burgesses at Droitwich, and subsequently among his neighbours at Oddingley, where he reigned the undisputed monarch of the place. Richard Hemming, who had only quite recently settled at Droitwich, had been employed by the Captain in various little jobs upon his farm. Dick's wife, whose maiden name had been Elizabeth Burton, was a native of the neighbouring parish of Claines, and her family lived at Smite Hill, between Oddingley and Hartlip Hall. It was probably through old Burton, the Smite carpenter, that Evans became acquainted with his son-in-law, and was first induced to give him a job. The reader will remember that before his marriage Hemming had been leading a wild life, and had fallen in with lawless companions. His reputation at Norton had not been immaculate, and he had been suspected of poaching in Lord Coventry's coverts

round Defford Common. Bredon and Eckington having grown too hot for him, he had retired to the neighbourhood of Droitwich, where (strange as it may appear) he had won the affections of one of the tidiest and prettiest girls in the neighbourhood, and, after his marriage, had set up as a jobbing carpenter and wheelwright in the parish of S. Nicholas in Wych. It is sometimes difficult to account for the tastes of either sex in their matrimonial selections, but all Elizabeth Burton's friends agreed that she was thrown away upon the strange, ungainly individual whom she had chosen for her husband. He was of shorter stature than herself, being only five feet three inches in height, thick set and tightly made, with large features, a high forehead, and brown curly hair on the top of his head; his eyes were dark hazel, his nose sharply cut, his mouth wide, and his heavy chin covered with a black beard. His face was round, and his complexion ruddy.* He usually wore a round old-fashioned hat, with a low crown and broadish brim, and was frequently clothed in a light brown coat with metal buttons. His general reputation stood low, although, as has been shown, he had come to Wych for the purpose of whitewashing his character. Old Burton had given him some work, and he had poured out his tale in the ears of Elizabeth, who, when others aspersed his credit, took up the cudgels in his defence, and thus, ill-favoured as he was, she came, like another Desdemona, to love him for the dangers he had passed. Richard Hemming had been little used to sympathy from others, and had been accustomed, during the greater portion of his life, to be snubbed and scouted as some noxious vermin, wherefore it is not surprising that when he felt himself pitied by one human being, he should, like Shakespeare's Moor, "love her that she did pity him." Although the old proverb of the devil being less black than he is painted, be untrue touching the spiritual enemy of our race, it holds good with respect to his human subjects; and if blemishes are usually distinguishable in the best of mortals, the worst are rarely lacking in some feeble rays of goodness, some lingering tokens of their divine original, and thus even Richard Hemming was not invariably cruel toward his comely and affectionate wife.

* He is thus described in a proclamation published in Berrow's *Worcester Journal* of 2nd July 1806.

On leaving Evelench farm, Captain Evans struck across the fields towards Oddingley Church, in order to avoid falling in with his comrades at the Plough. As he was approaching the well-timbered nook in which his dwelling lay snugly ensconced, he passed through a meadow containing an old gnarled oak, which had doubtless weathered the storms of some seven or eight centuries. Beneath this oak sat a man whom he speedily recognised as Dick Hemming, and who, as soon as he saw the Captain, rose and doffed his hat to him.

"Halloo, what brings thee here, Dick?"

"I met my wife on her way to Wych, and she tell'd me as your honour wished to see me, and I didn't just like to hang about the foldyard, so I came down here on the chance."

"Well, Dick, this is a bad business. You'll have to swing for it if you are knabbed."

"Well, your honour, you means about them precious stones? It warn't my job anyhow."

"You got three of the trinkets as your share of the plunder. Quite enough to convict you, Dick. Where are the rest?"

"Maybe in the melting-pot, or more likely in Lunnun streets by now."

"They'll soon be traced by the Bow Street detectives, you may make sure of that, Dick. We have sent them to the *Hue and Cry*, and written up to Bow Street. We shall have a 'runner' down to-morrow. I'll tell you what it is, Dick, unless the jewels be forthcoming within eight-and-forty hours of this, you must make up your mind to swing for it at Red Hill, otherwise you shall be well cared for, and if you get them back within that time, ye may reckon on fifty pounds for your pains—dost heed me, Dick?"

"By gad, Captain, you're hard upon me," returned Hemming, who continued after a few minutes' reflection: "Forty-eight hours—that be two days. It should be five or six at least. Suppose they be gone to Lunnun or Bristol, or some o' them big places. Beside, would your worship be satisfied with some on 'em—say half, and the pay according? A hundred or even two wouldn't be too much for the lot, that it wouldn't."

"Well, look here, Dick, if you bring me back the whole lot within two days, you shall have two hundred pounds

down to divide between yourself and chums; but, darn you, not a farthing more, by G——; dost hear me? That's the end of my tether."

"Make it three days, your honour, for the lot."

"Well, this is Monday—say Thursday—Thursday morning, at eight o'clock—eh, Dick?"

"And supposing, master, I can only find a part on 'em—what'll your honour do then? Will you give me half the money for half on 'em? I'm thinking your worship should give me a some'ut in writing about 'em, or I shall not know whether there be half or no."

"Well, Dick, thou shalt have thy share of the prize according to the number brought; and I'll get a proper list made out, which you shall see when you fetch me the trinkets."

He was not a little elated at the thought of having to return to Madeleine that afternoon for the inventory which she had promised, but had omitted to give him.

After some farther explanations they parted, and the Captain went home to the old black and white farmhouse beneath the church to get his dinner, which had been awaiting him for the last hour.

On passing the porch he entered the great kitchen or houseplace, with its wide open chimney, with seats on either side of the fireplace, on which the logs were smouldering. From the smoky rafters of the ceiling hung several flitches of bacon, while at the end of the apartment was a well-rubbed piece of oak furniture with shelves, on which bright plates and mugs were tidily arranged. In one of the straight, high-backed seats in the chimney sat an old lady, with a neatly-starched cap, gazing disconsolately at the pot simmering over the fire, and the bacon toasting in front of it. A fine, dashing looking girl, of five-and-twenty, who had been occupied in the culinary arrangements, came up to the Captain as he opened the door.

The former was a certain Mrs. Bankes, a widow lady, who for many years had dwelt under the Captain's roof with her daughter Katherine and one of her sons, George; Henry being in service elsewhere at that time.

Mrs. Bankes had long occupied the unenviable position of a poor relation, with its privileges and mortifications, in consequence of obligations of ancient date. But whatever may

have been her bygone claims upon her host's liberality, she was now treated as a supernumerary in the household, while her daughter, Miss Kate, was the apparent mistress of the establishment.

The old soldier looked on the girl as his adopted daughter, and treated her as such, allowing her to assume a tone of authority conceded to no one else in the domestic circle. Kate reciprocated his peculiar regard for her, showing him a deference which, judging by her demeanour towards others, seemed foreign to her nature. She snubbed her poor old mother most unmercifully, dealing with her as if she were but a piece of useless lumber in the place. As to her brother George, who was then eighteen and her junior by some years, although she acknowledged the ties of blood between them, yet she almost treated him as a menial, making him work upon the farm like any of the other servants.

Nevertheless, with all her hardness of disposition, Kate was a fine character, and withal a well-grown, handsome girl. The old Captain felt proud of her, and was pleased to exhibit her to his friends when they came to see him. She was tall and strongly made, with fair hair and skin, fine grey eyes, and rather an aquiline contour of countenance.

"How late you are, Captain!" (She usually addressed him as "Captain.") "Dinner will be spoilt. I made mother take it back to the kitchen to keep it hot. Whatever have you been about?"

"I'll tell you, Kitty; but has the old lady dined, for I don't want her to hear us, or she may blab it all about with her confounded gossip?"

"Never mind her; I'll send her to the kitchen, and give her her dinner on a plate—or let her wait, it won't hurt her."

"You should have given her her feed before with the rest. You are too hard on the old dame, Kate. You can cut her off some slices, and put her to eat it by the fire yonder. Make haste; I am as hungry as a hawk."

She hastened the preparations, and as soon as the two were seated in the parlour at their meal, the old soldier narrated his adventure to Kate, who listened with a mixed air of astonishment and annoyance.

"I hope, Captain, you're not going to be fooled by these foreigneering folk. No fool like an old fool, they say, and I know how it is—you let any wench who makes eyes at you

(especially if they be black ones) twist you inside out. I'll be bound she's no better than she should be. What could bring a decent young lady to such a clownish, clodhopping hole as that? She can't have come for any good. Most likely to hide something from her friends. That is it, you may depend upon it, Captain. I should like to know how she came by all these trinkets and jewels."

"By gad, she is quite a tip-top lady, a friend of the Mowbrays. I met the priest there to-day. She is a foreign refugee, and may have good reasons for holding herself aloof from Bony's spies. Who knows?"

"Well, Captain, I wouldn't trust much with her," she replied, thoughtfully.

"Come, Kitty, don't be silly; I'm going up to her again presently, as I find I forgot to get an inventory of the jewels."

"No, you shan't, Captain," she rejoined pettishly; "I'll go myself and see her. You know you're soft on her already, I know you are. I won't have you go fooling up there, only to make yourself a laughing-stock, for you don't think a young girl like that would care twopence for an old weather-beaten fop with a brown face and white hair. I'm sure I shouldn't in her place."

"Hang it, Kate, what makes you so savage to-day?" returned the old soldier pettishly. "I want you to make acquaintance with this foreign lady, for she's a dainty dame, I can tell you—quite a grand lady—might have been at the French Court. She reminds me of the Spanish ladies I used to see at Algeziras when I was a youngster. Hang it! I remember their black eyes and mantillas—aye, and their fans too, as if it were yesterday!"

"I daresay; you were young then, and wicked too, I have no doubt. I wonder what they'd care for you now, Captain?"

"Umph! nonsense, Kate; but darn it, I want you to see this lady and show her some civility."

"Much good may that do her! I'm not going to make a fool of myself by dancing up to your foreign markees or mounsiers neither. I suppose you mean to ask her here to drink syllabubs and whey, and do the grand lady in the parlour, whilst I serve her ladyship with strawberries and cream, and milk the cows for her amusement. Catch me eating humble pie to your excellency's grand dames."

"What is it you want, Kate?"

"I'll tell you what it is, Captain; you shall either give up that lady or give up me. I'll go away, that I will. Mother may stay with you, but I'll go off and better myself. I'll go to London."

"Don't be a confounded fool, Kate. I did not know you were such a jealous fool before. I wish I had never told you about this lady."

"D'ye think I shouldn't have found it out? Well, Captain, make your choice."

"But hear reason, Kate. Don't take on like this, lass. It is not for the matter of seeing the lady again, but for these jewels that have been stolen."

Thereupon he recounted to her the whole of what had passed between Elizabeth Hemming and himself, as well as his subsequent interviews with Mademoiselle de S. Pol and Dick Hemming.

"If you will go and see the lady and get her list, I'll promise not to call again on her, Kitty, without warning you, lass; I will indeed."

After this victory Miss Kate appeared in better humour, and having despatched the Captain to Droitwich on some errands, she visited Evelench in the course of the afternoon, and returned more favourably inclined toward the handsome foreigner and Father Southworth.

Late on the following afternoon Hemming appeared at the Church Farm and asked to see the Captain. Kate received him in her patron's absence, and, having ushered him into the parlour, regaled him with a mug of cider pending the host's absence.

"I suppose you want to see the Captain about these jewels?" said the young lady confidentially, as soon as she had closed the door. "What is it you've got in yonder bundle? Be those they?"

"You knows about it, miss? I thought as the Captain would have kept it close," returned Hemming, much surprised at finding she was in the secret.

"Come, Dick Hemming, you know he never keeps anything from me; but I'm as close as a coffin. It is the same as himself telling it to me. Don't you blab a word to any one outside, that's all; not to my brother George nor the old lady, mind! No one knows a word beside the Captain and

myself. Come now, out with it, Dick. What have ye got in that there bundle?"

"I've got 'em all, or next to it, I believes; but I'm not going to give 'em up without I gets the money as he promised, that I'm not."

"You're sure of your money, Dick. What did he promise you?"

"Two hundred pound—and I'm blessed if I gives 'em up till I gets it."

"That was if you brought them all?"

"They be all here, I'll be bound, unless it be a stray article or two."

"Well, look here, I'll tell you what it is, Dick. Master won't be home these two hours, for he is about some business in Wych."

"That's a bad 'un, for they'll be on my scent," returned Hemming, looking uneasily toward the window.

"Who? What d'ye mean?"

"Never mind, miss. I'd as lief go to Wych to meet the Captain, and hand him the trinkets down yonder."

"If you want your money at once you'll do no such thing, Dick. It isn't we who give you the money, it's the young lady. Now, you come with me to Evelench, and if the trinkets be correct you shall have it paid you down straight off."

Hemming asked no better than to obtain his promised guerdon without farther delay; therefore as soon as she had put on her sunshade he followed her out through a side gate of the garden, under some high overgrown hedges, across a succession of meadows towards Evelench, by a retired path-way used only for driving the Captain's cows to the Plough at Tibberton, where, to evade the tithe, he sent them daily to be milked.

Dick seemed uneasy as he went along, occasionally starting at the rustling of the leaves, and looking suspiciously round the corners of the fields to mark whether they were observed. But few words passed as they proceeded on their way, and those few consisted chiefly of brief reminders on the part of Hemming touching his anticipated reward.

"I hopes you'll be as good as your word, miss, or I'll not answer for any on us, that I won't. I'm not a-going to be fooled out o' my money, not for nobody."

On reaching the farmhouse at Evelench they met Master Lloyd the tenant, outside, who, being acquainted with Miss Bankes, admitted her into the house. There were two men prowling round the grounds, who were in fact the constables of that and the neighbouring parish of Bredecot. It was a case of locking the stable door after the mare was stolen; but the young lady and her maid being both nervous, the old Squire of Boughfield, on learning the details of the robbery from Father Southworth, had suggested this precaution.

However, Kate and her companion reached Mademoiselle de S. Pol's sitting-room without question, and being fully reassured as to his money by the young lady herself, the carpenter opened his bundle and displayed the contents. There were bracelets, necklaces, lockets, and other trinkets which had been stolen. She counted them over and arranged them in order, but as the case in which they had been carried off was not forthcoming, she had some difficulty in making sure of the completeness of the whole set.

"Where did you find them?" she asked.

"That's more than I can tell, miss. It bain't my bargain to let that out. They was given me by some one, may be."

"I wish you had happened to find the box as well."

"Broken up, most like," he returned.

"I am not quite sure, but there ought to be, let me see, another diamond bracelet, and also a locket belonging to this chain; yes, and let me see, the diamond and emerald necklace. Oh! and where are the turquoise pendants and the sapphire brooch?"

"Well, miss, I've done my best. I b'lieves they be all there. If there be more they must ha' dropped 'em on the way."

"Yes; it is only right you should have your reward."

"The full reward the Captain offered him was two hundred," interposed Miss Kate; "but he was only to have a proportionate part unless he brought the whole lot."

"Oh, he shall have the two hundred pounds, and he shall have another hundred if he brings me the rest. Wait, I'll fetch the money."

"There, Dick," said Miss Kate, as soon as Madeleine had left the room, "you see she's as good as her word, and that I didn't deceive you."

"Don't you go and say, miss, as she've given me this 'ere. Say as it was only fifty, miss."

"I don't know what you mean, Dick. I shouldn't tell a

soul about it, excepting the Captain, and I shall tell him the truth, that I shall."

As soon as Dick Hemming had received his money he slunk out of the house as quickly as he could and made off across the country to Droitwich, leaving Kate to return alone to the farm.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRENCH WOOD GANG.

MISS BANKES' absence had not been noticed by the servants at the farm, and when the Captain returned, about half an hour later, he was told that Hemming was awaiting him in the parlour.

"He's been gone these two hours," said Miss Kate when her master inquired for him.

"Gone is he? Why the dickens didn't ye keep him, wench, till I came?"

"Why should I keep him dawdling here, Captain?"

"And you've let him carry off the spoil? I'll be sworn he brought some of it, or he wouldn't have shown himself so soon."

She made him follow her into the parlour, where, with closed doors, she narrated all that had taken place, amidst a shower of condemnatory expletives from the Captain, who ended by being wheedled over into a general approval of what she had done.

In those days the farm-servants all supped together at a table presided over by the master and the mistress, and retired to rest soon afterwards. George Bankes, Kate's brother, was sent out after supper to see that all was right round the rickyard and the outbuildings. The night was very dark, and the youth came in rather scared, declaring that he had seen some men loitering by the churchyard.

"Did they speak to ye, George?" inquired the Captain.

"Yes; and I believe one on 'em is that footpad Pritchard. He flashed the bull's-eye of his lanthorn in my face, and asked me whether Dick Hemming was in the house."

"What didst tell him, George?"

"I said he'd been, but wasn't here now."

"The deuce you did. How did you know he'd been?"

"I saw him, Captain."

"Saw him? Well, what else did he say, George?"

"He asked me whether he'd left a parcel behind him. I said I didn't know, for I didn't see him go away; and then he swore at me and told me I was a blowed liar, and that Dick was hiding in the house now, and that I knew it, and that he'd blow my brains out. He pointed something at me, and I took to my heels."

"Did they follow ye, George?" asked the Captain, coolly.

"I didn't turn round to see, sir. I made straight for the door, and bolted it after me."

"Well, this must be looked to. Come, George, you won't do to fight Bony when he lands, if you cut and run like this. We must see to this." So saying, the old soldier pulled down his blunderbuss and a horse pistol, and set to work deliberately to load them.

"Now, George, we shall see what mettle you be of. Are you afraid to fire a ball into a man?"

"I hope not, Captain."

"I hope you're no coward, George, or I'll have no more to say t'ye."

"Nor I neither," added Miss Kate. "I'll not own him for a brother if he is a coward."

"Coward! Who says I'm a coward?" returned George, nettled. "I was one against two, and they were armed and I not."

"I'll face them," pursued Miss Kate. "Give me the pistol, Captain."

"Don't be a fool, lass. George 'll fight well enough. I've seen many a fellow funk the first onslaught, and yet become a very tiger in the fight. Come along, man, we'll go round the premises and see if we can spy these brave bandits, and give 'em a taste of our lead, eh?"

The two sallied forth, George keeping a little behind the Captain; and so they made the round of the foldyard, the rickyard, and the neighbouring churchyard fence, without hearing a sound or seeing a soul.

"Blowed if you haven't scared them off, George, whoever they be," said the Captain as they regained the garden gate. "After this we'll have a sup of grog."

They sipped their grog and retired to rest, but the Captain was a light sleeper, accustomed during his camp life to awaken at the sound of danger.

After a time he thought he heard a rat gnawing the wainscoting, and these sounds grew more distinct, as if the shutters of the room beneath were being wrenched open. He rose as gently as he could, and seizing his loaded blunderbuss, gently opened the casement of his chamber, through which by the glimmering twilight he could faintly distinguish the form of a man leaning forward as if in the act of entering through the window, while he thought he saw another under the porch beyond. With great dexterity and quickness he aimed his cumbrous weapon and fired it. The man uttered a piercing cry of murder, and appeared to roll over on the ground.

The Captain awoke George Bankes and one or two of the farm-servants; and, having donned his clothes, went downstairs into the parlour, the window of which had been forced open by the thieves. They then proceeded outside, thinking to find the body of the wounded man, but they sought him in vain.

"He must have crawled into the rickyard," suggested George.

As soon as daylight dawned, they could track his course by spots of blood along the ground. Following these across the meadows, they arrived at length at the confines of the Trench woods.

"Come along, we shall find him hidden among the copse," exclaimed a man named Elwins.

"Nay," returned Tom Langford, a lad of twelve years old, "he be got to the cave afore now."

"What cave?" asked George.

"Why, they say there be a cave in the midst of the woods where the robbers dwell. Sister lost her road in the wood a coming from Saleway, gathering cowslips, and saw smoke as came out of the ground like, and heard voices underfoot. There be a band on 'em."

"I have heerd speak on 'em. This 'ere Pritchard they talks on be one," rejoined Elwins.

"There be bones about the place," replied the lad mysteriously, "of them as they've murdered, most like."

"Come on," cried George Bankes; "don't be afraid. We will find out this cave if there be one."

"You may go alone, Master George," returned Elwins. "I'm bound to go home to see after the Captain's cows. You can take the boy along."

"Nay; I've got the pigs to feed, and then to hoe the peas," said the boy. "I dursn't stay."

"So you are afraid of these robbers too, Tom?" said George. "You'll neither on you do to face Bony when he lands."

On the ground of discretion being the better part of valour, all three finally retreated to communicate their experiences to their master, and, with his approval, to invoke the aid of a stronger force for the exploration of the Trenches. On their return, however, they found that the Captain had gone to Droitwich in order, as it was supposed, to obtain the assistance of the magistrates.

The distance was about three miles by the road, and rather less by a footpath across the fields. In those days the little borough, famous for its brine, was less smoky than it has since become. It lies in a basin surrounded by fertile meadows and wooded knolls, and contrasts painfully with the beauty of its surroundings. The place is not without its traditions, but those historical memories find no expression in the brick and mortar of its existing edifices. To judge by appearances, it might be one of the latest emanations of the coal and iron industries of the Black Country. It consists of salt-works with tall chimneys, and one or two ill-built, tumble-down streets, of which the wretched two-storeyed houses are contorted by the continual sinkings of the soil, caused (it is supposed) by the exhaustion of the salt rock beneath. Yet this collection of ill-built brick houses, blackened by the smoke of the furnaces, occupies the site of a town dating back to the Roman period, and already famous in the days of the Heptarchy. In the Middle Ages it supplied a great part of England with salt, and was a place of note in the midland shires. A great saint, S. Richard, was born there, and pilgrimages were performed to a shrine erected there to his memory. Before the introduction of coal, the forest of Feckenham furnished wood for the evaporation of the brine; and in his Itinerary, Leland (writing in Henry VIII.'s time) mentions that the forest had been much thinned to supply these furnaces. In those days the salt water was collected in small circular vessels of lead, and evaporated

over wood fires. Each saulter's house in Wych possessed several of these pans, and a considerable population was employed in this business. It was so profitable that the neighbouring knights and squires possessed themselves of vats, and employed their serfs in carrying on an industry which proved more lucrative than agriculture. The wealthier landowners of Worcestershire invested in houses in Wych, and farmed them out to the saulters and burgesses of the town as a source of income. It was not till the close of the seventeenth or commencement of the eighteenth century that a wholesale method of manufacturing salt was substituted for the older system, and extensive pans made to replace the small bullaries or vats of former days. In 1803 the Salt Company of Droitwich was a species of monopoly, and although the coal fires had materially changed the aspect of the borough from what it had been in ancient times, there were not as yet any very tall chimneys to disperse the noxious fumes beyond the confines of the town, of which the streets retained some traces of their former picturesque appearance. One of its mediæval characteristics had been the half-timbered construction of its gabled houses and the peculiarly rich ornamentation of its brick chimneys. The black and white façades still predominated at the period of our narrative, and there were remains of the old moulded chimneys to be found here and there. Among the former specimens the George Inn was conspicuous. It was a gabled, half-timbered hostelry, standing in an open space in the centre of the town, with a trough in front of it, where his Majesty's mail from the north of England to Bristol, and several stage-coaches, were wont to draw up for watering their horses and some to change their teams.

Entering the town by a deep narrow lane called the Holloway, the Captain passed certain almshouses and schools erected by a Coventry in fulfilment of a wager with a Pakington, and thence known as the Coventry Charity. Turning to the left, he came into a wider street conducting to the open space where stood the head inn already mentioned. Drawn up before it was a private barouche, changing horses. The four steeds which had driven it from Alcester were standing by the trough, while others were being led forth to replace them. Three young gentlemen were sitting inside, whilst a fourth individual, who might have been a gentleman

from his appearance, although in reality a confidential valet, was standing on the steps of the hotel paying the driver for the posters. There was moreover a powdered footman in livery by the side of the carriage.

The Captain stared on seeing this handsome equipage, of which he recognised the proprietorship from the arms and liveries.

"Ha, Captain Evans!" cried young Lord Shelsley, at once recalling the features of the old soldier as the latter raised his hat; "I am very glad to see you. How fares it at Oddingley?"

"Very well, my lord. I hope your lordship may be able to come and look up the partridges this year, but I fear that may be impossible under the circumstances. Nevertheless we shall remember your lordship on the auspicious occasion."

"What d'ye mean, Evans? Ah! I suppose you allude to a stupid paragraph which appeared in the papers. Not a word of truth in it—a fabrication from beginning to end; indeed, it was contradicted. I suppose you did not see the contradiction? And how are matters getting on here in the borough?"

"Right well, by gad, my lord; the two members dined with us at our last audit. Your lordship's interests are well cared for."

Droitwich was then regarded as a pocket-borough of his lordship's, for there were but twelve burgesses, more or less nominees of Lord Shelsley, who elected the two members for the constituency.

"Well, Captain, mind you tell everybody that the paragraph was a hoax. By-the-bye, what was it about Oddingley you were reading from the newspaper at Stratford, Frank, about some thieves in the Trench woods? Have you had any robberies of late?"

"Ay, by gad, my lord; my house was broken into last night by the rascals. That is what brings me here to-day."

"Is not there a farmhouse called Evelench somewhere near Oddingley?" inquired one of Lord Shelsley's companions, a young gentleman with fair hair and clear complexion, and altogether of prepossessing exterior and manners.

"Ah, by gad, then, your worship saw some allusion, no doubt, to the Evelench affair. I don't know how it got into the papers. The lady has recovered all her jewels."

"What was the story, Captain? I never heard there was a lady in the case," returned his lordship. "You kept that to yourself, Frank, when you read me the paragraph."

"Did I? I don't remember," returned Frank Wyvil, for it was he.

"It was one of these foreign refugees, my lord, who has been quartered near Squire Mowbray, but has lately come to Evelench."

"What's that you say? What is her name?" inquired Lord Shelsley in a flurried tone. "Was this in the paper, Frank?"

"It merely said a foreign lady, or something to that effect."

"I heard the name, but I can't make sure I remember it," said the Captain. "I have mostly heard her called the French lady; but I think it is something like Saint Paul."

"By Jove! Mademoiselle de S. Pol. If we were not bound to meet these Bewdley people, Edward, I would go off there at once. But you say, Captain, she has found her jewels. I hope no harm was done. Tell me the whole story."

The old soldier briefly related the circumstances of the robbery, taking credit to himself for the recovery of the jewels by the offer of a reward.

"What the deuce could have taken her to that outlandish region? I thought she had gone back to France, not seeing her in town. Are you sure of the name, Captain? What is she like?"

The Captain rather coloured up at this question, as if conscious that his manor was open to intrusion.

"A good-looking young lady, by George."

"Dark hair and eyes; tall, with delicate features?"

"You'll make the Captain blush, Shelsley," said his lordship's elder companion. "He's afraid of your poaching on his preserve; but Oddingley is, after all, one of your lordship's manors."

"It ain't in Oddingley, my lord," exclaimed the Captain, as if taking the banter in earnest, and yet laughing while he said it.

"Where is it?" asked Frank Wyvil.

"It is one of your Papist properties, Frank," rejoined his lordship. "It is Squire Mowbray's—isn't it, Evans?"

"Yes, my lord; it lies in Tibberton."

The horses were harnessed, the post-boys mounted, and the valet, standing by Captain Evans' side, only awaited a pause in the conversation to announce these facts.

"All ready, my lord," he said, touching his hat.

"Good morning, Captain, and mind what I have told you. All right!"

And off they drove towards Holt Ferry, the shortest road to his lordship's mansion of Whitefield Court.

The Captain's idea in visiting Droitwich was not so much in the first instance with a view to invoking the aid of the strong arm of the law, as to discover the authorship of the robbery, and from the first he had shrewdly suspected that Dick Hemming might be able to throw some light upon the affair. As soon, therefore, as the carriage drove off, he pursued his walk towards Hemming's house, deferring his usual visits to the Town Hall and the George coffee-room until his return. He thought it advisable to avoid meeting his numerous friends by turning in among the salt-works, and skirting the canal towards the dingy cottage inhabited by the Hemmings, in the direction of the Kidderminster road.

He knocked once or twice at the door before obtaining a response, but at length it was opened by Elizabeth Hemming, who looked scared and flurried, exhibiting traces of recent tears.

"Is Dick Hemming at home?" inquired the Captain.

"No, indeed, your worship."

"What have you been crying about, my good wench? Has he been beating you, the rascal?"

"Not so, your honour; but he be very sore about them trinkets, and laid all the blame on me."

"Why, bless the fellow, he got more than enough to set you up for life."

"It ain't that; he's been done out of every farthing o' that. I know'd how it 'ud be, along with them thieving scamps."

"What do you mean? He left Evelench with a couple of hundred pounds in bank-notes."

"You never mean to tell me that, your honour! Why, he said it was fifty they robbed him on."

"Who robbed him?"

"Well, your honour, it was these Crowle folk, Pritchard,

Yates, and they. It seems as one of their chums had spied him going to your honour's house, and made up their minds as he'd taken them precious stones there. One on 'em came here—that was Yates most likely—about five o'clock, and asked me which way Dick had gone. I never see'd no more on him till past nine o'clock, and then Dick come in reeling drunk, and laid him down and slept. It warn't till seven o'clock this morning as he'd come round, and then he felt in his pockets, and swore they'd robbed him of all his money. He hadn't told 'em a word of how he got the money from the lady, so he says—not as far as he remembers, and he be close enough when he's tight, be Dick. They taxed him with taking them jewels, and he recollects their asking to search him, but he can't just recall their taking the money from him, but he had a tussle with them down by Fawson Pitts, and was bruised all over with their kicking on him. He heard 'em say as they'd make your honour give up the stones—that he could swear to."

"The devil they did! What did they say?"

"They says as how the Captain (meaning your honour) should give up the stones, or as Dick should pay for it with his life; but that was afore they'd robbed him. I didn't know, your worship, as it was two hundred. I doubt they'll rest satisfied with that—and to think that we should ha' lost it."

This information led Evans to suspect that in attacking his house, the burglars might have been mainly actuated by a desire to recover the lost trinkets. He thought it prudent to reveal no further particulars to the poor woman, but returned to the coffee-room at the George to read the London papers, and reflect upon the expediency of procuring and publishing the numbers of the missing notes with a view of stopping their circulation. There was an awkwardness in the business as regarded himself. He had been taking the law into his own hands with reference to the recovery of the jewels, and he did not feel quite comfortable on that score, as he fancied that his proceedings might be construed into condoning a felony. On the whole, therefore, he felt it safer to conceal Hemming's share in the transaction, and to lay the whole blame of the attempted burglary upon the mysterious Trench wood gang, who were so much dreaded throughout the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XI.

FRANK WYVIL'S SEARCH.

WHEN Lord Shelsley had introduced his cousin to the leading men of the Bewdley constituency, he returned to London without yielding to the foolish infatuation which on the first impulse seemed to prompt him to proceed in search of the young marquise, with whom he had gone such lengths at Bath. He might possibly have gratified his fancy but for a pressing letter from a certain countess, who exercised a tutelary influence over him, urging him to return for a party which she was giving in his honour, and at which he was to meet a lady whom she destined to be the successful rival of Madeleine in his affections. The tidings gleaned from the provincial paper, and confirmed by the Captain, produced a less evanescent effect upon Lord Shelsley's fellow-traveller. Frank Wyvil kept his own counsel on the subject, but, when his lordship announced his intention of returning to London, pleaded an invitation to pass a few days with some relatives in Herefordshire before going back to town. He owed a visit to these kinsfolk, and to avoid awakening his lordship's suspicions by mentioning a visit to Boughfield or Hartlip, availed himself of the excuse, intending to return by way of Worcester, and spend a day or two in search of Madeleine.

The air of Rotherstone Court was not quite congenial to him. His religion had of late sat lightly upon him, and he felt ill at ease in the society of fervent Catholics leading exemplary lives. The famous Bishop Milner was staying at the Court, and the conversation took a turn to which Frank

had been little used of late. He came in for one of the greater feasts of the Church, of which he had not remembered the approach, and, after two days with his relatives, was glad to plead an excuse to be off. The stage-coach from Hereford to Worcester passed over the Wind Point of the Malvern chain, northward of Camp Hill. He had engaged the box-seat, and found the driver a loquacious and amusing companion, brimful of information and anecdotes illustrative of the topography of their route.

He had stories about Holme Lacy and the old Duke of Norfolk; nor were Ledbury and Eastnor without their histories.

"This here was Mistress Russell's estate of Little Malvern Court. There be a charitable sort of a lady here now, though she be a Papist, who has given shelter to a lot o' them refugees as were druv out of France and them countries by the Rev'lution. There be now one on 'em—I don't know what you calls him—a sort of a priest like—monk I think it is they calls it, as ye may see reg'lar every day, winter and summer, though now when the leaves is on I can't just make sure of catching a sight on him, walk up and down one fixed walk a-reading a book, or at times a-twisting some'at in his hands like a chain. There he be with his face a-looking down, and never even so much curiosity as to look up at my team—not even on the last election day, as I had them four greys all decked out in favours, looking as sleek, and stepping out as reg'lar as if they'd been broken to it, and yet they was harnessed together for the first time that 'ere blessed day, as we carried the freemen gratis to the poll, all wearing rosettes in their hats. Never see'd the like o' them 'osses. All Ledbury was agog to catch a sight on 'em, and yet, would ye believe it, devil a bit did he look up at 'em. Never know'd such persewerance in a bad cause, as you may say."

While the coach rumbled on they had passed the Wind Point, and having put on the drag, were descending a steep incline, when Frank Wyvil's attention was arrested by the sight of two ladies, accompanied by a dog, proceeding in the same direction as the coach, whose backs were consequently turned upon him.

"Mistress Wakeman, most like," said the coachman in a low voice, as his coach gained upon them.

Hearing it coming, the ladies turned off the road into a by-path leading down the steep hill in the direction of some enclosed grounds.

From the first moment that his eyes had rested upon their forms, Frank had been struck by the graceful figure of the younger of the two, whose dog reminded him of one which he had seen three or four years before at Boughfield. As the coach drove by the spot at which the ladies had quitted the road (from which they were then some ten yards distant) the dog barked, and caused them to look round.

"Good morning, madam," cried the jarvie, raising his hat with the customary politeness of the times; "fine day, madam!"

Frank Wyvil also raised his hat, but not to Mrs. Wakeman, for his eyes were fixed in rapture upon her lovely companion, in whom he recognised the beautiful girl of whom he was in search.

She returned his bow rather stiffly, and, averting her face, walked onward almost before Mrs. Wakeman had concluded her acknowledgment of the coachman's civil recognition. The young gentleman felt disconcerted by this untoward event, and at a loss how to shape his course. Although consoling himself with the reflection that she might possibly not have known him, he was met by the further difficulty that being unacquainted with Mrs. Wakeman, he had no plea for presenting himself at her house.

The small village of Malvern Wells had attained a certain celebrity on account of its remarkably pure spring, called the Holy Well, and at the period of which we are treating it contained at least two houses appropriated to the use of visitors, one of which was designated as a boarding-house, whilst the other assumed the more ambitious title of hotel. The Admiral Benbow was also in existence, and a certain number of small villas had likewise sprung up in the neighbourhood. It occurred to Frank that he should like to spend a day or two at this delightful spot, in order to ramble over the hills, and thus possibly to fall in with the beautiful Madeleine. Indeed, he conceived the project of even calling at the Court; but he felt that he should be better able to do so after renewing his acquaintance with the young lady, whose cold return to his salutation still rankled in his breast.

He took up his abode at the more fashionable of the two establishments, where he arrived just in time for the *table d'hôte* dinner. He found himself seated next to a very agreeable and conversational young lady, who appeared to be well acquainted with the neighbourhood, and indeed with the county generally. Her father was placed immediately beyond her, and the other members of the family farther on.

"I suppose you are new to our Malvern Hills?" she ventured after he had addressed her.

"Quite," he returned; "and yet I know this part of England otherwise pretty well."

"You know Worcestershire?"

"Yes, very well. I have many friends in the county."

"I suppose, then," she said, "you will visit Worcester during our musical festival in September?"

"Ha! Is it at Worcester this year? I had forgotten. I fancy I may be down at Whitefield Court at that time for the partridge-shooting."

"Then you should certainly sacrifice a few days of your sport to attend the Three Choirs' Festival, when you will hear Handel's oratorios to perfection. I suppose you have seen our cathedral?"

"Years ago. There's King John's tomb, isn't there, and some other royal personage's?"

"Prince Arthur's. I am afraid it did not make much impression upon you; but the music sounds very grand among those old Gothic arches. The place seems built on purpose for it. It is almost thrown away at other times. When I hear some of the more solemn strains of Handel there, I cannot help thinking how fine it must have been to hear the old monks singing in it. I suppose you have read Walter Scott's descriptions of Melrose and Whitby?"

"I am not very poetical, I fear," returned Wyvil; "and yet I confess to being pleased with the 'Lady of the Lake.' I suppose you have never been abroad on the Continent and seen the churches there?"

"Oh, no; they must be beautiful. Have you?"

"Yes; as a boy, I was educated in France, and visited it again lately during the peace. Some of the churches have been a good deal knocked about by the Revolution, but those that remain entire are far more striking than ours, Amiens and Rouen for instance. Then whatever you may

think of the functions, they are so evidently in harmony with the structures, which are built on purpose for them."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I mean that however much you may prefer the system of minor canons, in queer white gowns and Oxford hoods, accompanied by a dozen scuffling urchins in dirty smocks, singing English Psalms twice a day in the choir for the benefit of half a dozen old ladies and a few spectators, while the whole body of the building is reserved for a display of tombstones and monumental effigies of the most approved patterns; one must, I think, admit that the foreign arrangements seem more consonant with the original design of the architects, and make a more genuine use of the edifice. There they make use of every portion of the structure. There are altars in every chapel round the aisles, even to the very rear of the sanctuary, where Masses are daily said, and then processions wind round the aisles, and the whole interior is constantly employed for purposes of either collective or individual worship. You might not like the images and so on, but still what I contend for is that they use these buildings and we do not."

"Surely you would not have Roman Catholic images substituted for our pure Protestant worship?"

"Umph! Well, I don't know what your pure Protestants do worship. I have occasionally seen a lady kneel down in her pew, but I never saw a Protestant gentleman worship anything but the inside of his hat, and that he usually has the decency to perform sitting, or at best standing."

"You are a Protestant, I hope."

This was a crucial question for Frank Wyvil, who was too much inclined to conceal his faith, and the temptation to human respect was in this instance all the more severe in that Constance Pendrell was decidedly attractive. He coloured up slightly as he replied:

"No, indeed; I'm of an old Catholic family."

"Oh, really!" she exclaimed in a mingled tone of pity and surprise, accompanied by an expression of horror, from which she instantly sought to recover herself.

"Yes; we have always been Catholics, although, to say the truth, I am rather a lax one; and I dare say, after all, there is not much difference between us on that score."

"Some of the Roman Catholics are so very exclusive.

There are one or two families on our side of Worcestershire, who shut themselves up like hermits, and nobody knows them. I suppose you are not like them?"

"Well, no, I hope not; but who do you allude to, for perhaps it is less their fault than the fault of their neighbours that they are not visited?"

"I fear it is partly theirs. For instance, there is that beautiful old place Hartlip, which I have always been longing to see, and have never succeeded in penetrating, because it is in the hands of one of those exclusive old families."

"Do you live near Hartlip?" inquired Frank.

"About four miles from it," she replied.

"May I ask the name of your place?"

"We live at Hallowcliffe, a house which my father rents from the Holmdens."

"A red brick house? I know it well by sight," returned Wyvil. "I used to pass it in going to Hanville."

"You know Hanville, then. Perhaps you are acquainted with the Melshrubs at Hanville Rectory?"

"I have often met them at the Hall in former days."

On hearing of the Melshrubs, Mr. Pendrell, who had only caught a few fragments of the conversation between his daughter and Wyvil, stretched forward and introduced himself by relating some anecdotes with reference to the former possessors of Hanville.

Glad to escape from so loquacious a personage, Frank spent the evening in wandering over the hills in the direction of Little Malvern. The atmosphere, which was clear and balmy, enabled him to scan the distant views on both sides of the range, and the increasing loveliness of the prospect allured him onward until he had passed the summit of the Camp Hill. Hitherto he had vainly sought a guide to direct him, but a little beyond the Hereford Beacon he discerned a shepherd boy, of whom he inquired the position of Little Malvern Court, which in fact lay almost immediately below the nearly perpendicular hill on which he then stood. A steep and rugged path brought him down to the confines of a wooded ravine, bounded by a rough broken-down fence, which, although intended to guard its privacy, might easily be overlooked by a stranger prepared to view the district as one of uninterrupted wilderness. A clear stream meandered through this sylvan glen, and Frank Wyvil was naturally

tempted to pursue the pathway flanking its course. Following this for some distance he found himself in an open park-like meadow, overshadowed by stately trees, but almost as steep as any portion of the hill, whilst below him arose a picturesque group of building composed of the old turreted edifice of Little Malvern Court, backed by the Gothic tower of the old monastic church and the ruins of its once stately aisles. He stood for a moment contemplating the prospect rendered doubly picturesque by the declining rays of the westering sun gilding the summits of the towers, while the lower portions of the building were overshadowed by the hills. His attention was almost instantly drawn to a tall thin figure walking slowly along the pathway in front of him, apparently absorbed in a book. On a nearer approach he recognised in the stranger the religious already described to him by the driver of the stage-coach. On reaching a certain line marked by a depression in the turf bordering the walk, the old man turned back without once raising his eyes in the direction of Frank Wyvil. Although the habit was not ecclesiastical and still less monastic, there was nothing in his worn brown suit which obliterated the evident profession of its occupant. In that emaciated face and figure, with its bare bald head and unmistakeably devout expression, a stranger could almost read the character and calling of the man. The Carthusian monk, for such he was, walked onwards absorbed in his Office, despite Wyvil's efforts to attract his attention. For a few minutes he followed close upon his footsteps, and then, not daring to interrupt his prayers, passed him and pursued his way toward the lawn in front of the mansion. Both the lawn and the architectural group to which it formed a foreground were remarkable for their separate beauties, but in combination it would be difficult to find a more complete and perfect whole. The group consisted of the old Benedictine abbey church, partly in ruins, but with its graceful perpendicular tower yet entire, and the manor-house constructed out of *débris* of the cells. Portions of the old monastery had unquestionably been left erect, and had become incorporated into the dwelling-house. A round tower encased in rough-cast and a half-timbered gabled construction were among the surviving specimens of its original destination. Standing back upon a lawn studded with fine evergreens and stately forest-trees, and backed by a bird's-

eye prospect over the valleys of the Severn and the Avon, bounded by Broadway, Bredon, and the Cotswold range, these buildings formed a graceful centre to a lovely picture. One extremity of the lawn was overshadowed by a wide-spreading and stately lime tree, beneath whose dense foliage the tenantry had often dined, whilst at the other stood a giant specimen of the Portugal laurel, covering a vast space in its circumference.

As he approached the mansion, Frank Wyvil's attention was arrested by sounds of music, which seemed to root him to the spot on which he stood. They came from behind the lime. The words were French, and were sung to the accompaniment of a guitar by a voice which he instantly recognised. Each word was uttered distinctly, and the song might be thus imitated:—

La Reine des Anges.

When the Queen of the Angels in glory ascended
And triumphed for ever o'er death and the grave,
Then the hymns of the nine choirs of heaven were blended
With the songs of the saints and the martyred brave!
Assuming royal state,
She reigned Immaculate,
With hosts of seraphs clustering all around;
Meanwhile the death-like gloom
Had vanished from her tomb,
And garlands of flowerets bespangled the ground.

When the Queen of the Angels in glory ascended,
Leaving wreaths of sweet flowers in her place,
'Twas to prove that henceforth all our sorrows are blended
With the sweet smelling blossoms of grace!

There was something in the purity of her accents which so harmonised with the words as to produce a self-conscious sensation of unworthiness in Frank's mind, causing him to feel as if he scarcely dared approach this peerless creature, on whom his imagination had of late fixed itself. Since his first acquaintance with her he had not done much to justify his returning to claim her as a prize. He had striven to forget her by plunging into frivolity and dissipation, and now that he felt *blasé* in the pursuit of pleasure, he was returning to his first love. There was something startling to his worldliness in this first re-introduction to the being upon whom he had been fixing his aspirations. Nevertheless he

was not to be daunted in his purpose, and only awaited the termination of her song to present himself with that self-possession and effrontery which he conceived sufficient to ensure his success with an uninitiated country lass.

Madeleine and her companion were startled by a rustling of the leaves, and were not a little surprised when a fashionably dressed gentleman presented himself before them.

"Pardon my intrusion, ladies, but I have been attracted in my rambles by the most exquisite music I ever heard. Ha! is it possible," he continued, "that the entrancing melody proceeded from your lips? Ah! Mademoiselle de S. Pol, who would have thought to meet you here?"

"Mr. Wyvil!" she exclaimed, colouring deeply, but speedily recovering herself. "Mr. Wyvil, Mrs. Wakeman," she pursued, introducing him to her hostess.

"I fancied I had a vision of you this morning, and I am rejoiced to discover that I was not deceived. It is indeed a happiness greater than I had deserved, or even dreamed, to find myself once again in the presence of Mademoiselle de S. Pol. We are old friends, if I may venture to say so," he said, turning to Mrs. Wakeman. He then went on to inquire after the Mowbrays, and by degrees managed to draw both ladies into the conversation and to keep them talking until it grew dusk and the bell sounded for night prayers in the chapel.

"Good-night," said Madeleine, more coldly than he could have wished as she rose to depart.

"But not good-bye, I hope," he said, "for I am spending a few days at the Wells, and venture to trust that Mrs. Wakeman will allow me to call again before I leave; to-morrow perhaps?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," returned the hospitable lady of the house. "Will you not give us the pleasure of your company at dinner to-morrow? We dine at four o'clock."

This was precisely what Frank Wyvil desired. It was too dark for him to have observed the expression on Madeleine's face, which, had he seen it, might possibly have counteracted the chilling effect of her tones.

Nevertheless he returned on the following day, and found a visitor who had unexpectedly dropped in for a passing call on his way northwards. Mr. Durville was a member of an old Catholic family in Lancashire, who, like too many others at that period, had been neglectful in the practice of his reli-

gion. His fidelity to the Church was apparently rather the effect of old associations and social ties than of any stronger bonds of charity, but there must have been some latent spark of faith which retained him as it were in his own despite. With the ladies his conversation was mainly touching their mutual acquaintances, but was intermixed with anecdotes not always free from detraction and occasionally seasoned with doubtful allusions. There was an offhand dashing gallantry in his manner which produced the impression that he was carrying on a flirtation with every young lady whom he came across, and when Frank Wyvil arrived and found him seated on the lawn chatting with Madeleine his jealousy was naturally awakened. However, nothing could be more cordial than his manner towards the new-comer, whom he had already met, and with whose family he was well acquainted.

"Left town already? Why, I thought you would be up to your neck in engagements at this time. It must be a serious matter that brings you down in the height of the season, I should fancy, eh?" he pursued, giving a cunning side glance toward Mademoiselle de S. Pol, and heedless of the momentary confusion which his remarks evoked on the countenance of Frank and perhaps also of Madeleine. "Some matrimonial speculation I am afraid. Ha, ha, my friend! You are on the look-out for money and beauty combined. It is worth bidding a momentary farewell to your London dissipations for that, no doubt."

"I don't know what you mean to insinuate," returned Frank, with an unmistakeable air of annoyance.

"Come, come, Wyvil; don't be put out with trifles," replied the other, "or you'll make us think that there is something more in my banter than a mere joke. How did you leave our friends the Doringtons?"

"Very well. They gave a ball which was very tolerable."

"And Miss Kitty? There are all sorts of reports about you and Miss Kitty."

"A parcel of lies," rejoined Frank indignantly.

"A nice girl. You need not be ashamed of being coupled with so charming a young lady. She will have a tolerable fortune, too, considering. From ten to fifteen thousand, they say. Shall I meet you there next month?"

"Not I. No."

"Are you coming into Lancashire this autumn? I sup-

pose you'll be at the Jellards and the Clayfords during the shooting season?"

"I may, perhaps. I don't know."

"I suppose you know about Tom Clayford?"

"I heard that he was married."

"Ay, married and thrown off his faith. He made a public recantation. A man's a fool to do that sort of thing."

"I don't understand Tom Clayford's object," returned Wyvil; "but I suppose he was driven into it by the girl's family."

"They don't respect a fellow for doing that kind of thing," replied Durville. "I mean to say that whatever a fellow may think—and Heaven knows, I'm not particular—a man's a simpleton to make a fool of himself in public. I'd see all the parsons at Jericho before I'd eat humble pie before them in that way."

"He has got the prospect of a hundred thousand pounds by his marriage; so, after all, he's not such an ass as you fancy," rejoined Frank, taking up the cudgels for his friend.

"Not to lose his soul for a hundred thousand pounds?" inquired Madeleine, horrified at his remark.

"Ah, yes, well; but what I mean to say is, that supposing he was thoroughly convinced," observed Wyvil.

"What! Convinced of heresy? How shocking."

"Come, Wyvil, you've put your foot into it," said Durville laughing. "We had better change the subject," and then he rambled on into some other topic, and every now and then cunningly drew out from Frank some incautious reply which grated upon Madeleine's ears as much as that which we have already recorded; so that by the end of the day her impressions of her former lover were less favourable than ever. As he returned home that evening he felt angry with himself and still more angry with Durville, who had so thoroughly succeeded in exposing his weak points to the object of his admiration.

He resolved to defer his next visit until after Durville's departure, which he had understood to be fixed for the following day.

He whiled away the interval by ingratiating himself with his acquaintances of the *table d'hôte*. Miss Constance Pendrell was not only agreeable and communicative, but decidedly good-looking. He joined her father in his rambles, and

so ingratiated himself that he was invited into their private sitting-room, where he made himself agreeable to Mrs. Pendrell, and on the eve of their departure, two days later, accepted an invitation to Hallowcliffe.

Before they left, Miss Constance Pendrell expressed her desire to finish a sketch which she had commenced.

"I cannot persuade papa to accompany me," she said, "and I shall go away without finishing the one drawing I was most anxious about. Will you take pity upon me, Mr. Wyvil?"

"Delighted!" exclaimed Frank, little knowing whither she was about to conduct him.

He started off to escort Constance and her sister, who to his consternation led the way towards Little Malvern Church, eager to complete a sketch of the ruins of the old Priory. Gallantry prompted him to carry their sketch-books and drawing materials as well as the camp-stools for their accommodation.

Although he dreaded the possibility of falling in with Madeleine or Mrs. Wakeman, yet he consoled himself with the reflection that he could introduce them to the ladies by his side and pass off the adventure with the adroitness of a man of the world. However, just as he approached the entrance to the Court he heard a sound of carriage-wheels, and as the road was narrow, Miss Constance, alarmed at the prospect of being run over, seized his arm and held on while the open carriage drove by. Madeleine and Mrs. Wakeman were its only occupants, and the former bowed coldly to him as she passed. Completely out of humour with himself and his companions, he nevertheless completed his task and returned with them to the hotel, receiving for his pains an invitation to spend a week at Hallowcliffe.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FESTIVAL OF THE THREE CHOIRS IN 1803.

MADELEINE was well pleased to return to Boughfield to meet her dear friend Mrs. Mowbray on her arrival. To her she willingly recapitulated her adventures, and in most of them elicited her sympathy. That charming lady (whose portrait is to be seen upon the staircase at Boughfield) was much interested in the story of the jewel robbery, and was vexed that Madeleine had not prosecuted her endeavours to regain those trinkets which were still missing. She was likewise very curious with reference to her interviews with Frank Wyvil, whom she was inclined to judge more leniently than Madeleine seemed then disposed to do. They had rambled forth on a sultry afternoon in August, and had seated themselves on the bole of a tree in the deer park, beneath the shade of the magnificent elms for which it was remarkable.

"I am afraid, Madeleine, that you will end by leaving us all, and will settle down as Madame de Francheville, forgetting that you have ever been in England, or at best remember it as a childhood's dream."

"No, I don't think so," she returned solemnly. "Why do you say so?"

"Because you don't really care for English things and English people."

"Oh, don't I. I care for one dear Englishwoman more than I can tell," she exclaimed, throwing her arms round her friend's neck and embracing her tenderly.

"Dearest child," returned Mrs. Mowbray, "will you pro-

mise always to love me like that, when you are far away in your own France?"

"Yes, indeed; always—always."

"Ah, I knew it; that is just what I dread. In your secret heart of hearts, Madeleine, you look forward to going back to France and settling there. Own that such is the case!"

"No; I have never so much as given it a thought. Why should I? I am so happy here, especially now I am back with you."

"You ought to think a little of the future, Madeleine. Tell me, darling child, what you think of—of Mr. Wyvil?"

"What a question! I don't know that I've thought about him at all, excepting that—that I thought him a—well, a flirt."

"A flirt!" returned Mrs. Mowbray laughing. "He must have flirted with you, Madeleine, for you to say that."

"The value of his speeches to me was fairly tested by his attention to others. I last saw him escorting two young ladies all alone to sketch, and one was clinging to his arm."

"His cousins, perhaps."

"No; I am sure they were some of his numerous acquaintances. Besides, I don't care for him. He is lax in his faith and full of levity."

"You are very unfair towards him. Do you know, Madeleine, we saw something of him in London, and thought him wonderfully improved? His expectations are not to be despised. We both came to the conclusion that he would not be a bad *parti* for you."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Mowbray, how can you be so absurd? Please do not think of anything of the kind, and as you love me, never mention the subject again! Promise me, *never*."

"Very well, Madeleine, as you please. We will try and find somebody else; but of course you will marry a Catholic, and Catholics are few and far between here in England."

Madeleine sighed, and the subject dropped.

Some weeks later occurred the Worcester Music Meeting. The festival of the Three Choirs dated back to the first half of the eighteenth century, being held alternately in the three cathedrals of Worcester, Gloucester, and Hereford. In the coldest days of Protestant stagnation, when even the evanescent Anglicanism of the Caroline period had been extin-

guished by the frigid moralities of the Revolution, the choirs of these three western minsters invented this method of utilising their then useless fabrics. These glorious old Gothic piles were the work of a race of heroes now apparently extinct throughout the land. They had been ruthlessly wrenched from those who alone had known how to employ them. They were built for purposes utterly foreign to the whole life and tendencies of the eighteenth century, and beyond its feeble comprehension. The so-called religion which held possession of them in the eighteenth century had nothing whatever in common with the old faith which had constructed them. The choir, the nave, the transepts, the aisles, the chapels were, it is true, all instinct with symbolism, but were nevertheless all erected for objects of the most patent utility. Their symbolism may have been an accident, their utility was obvious to all. If there is a harmony and a beauty in the ensemble of spire and tower, nave, choir, and aisles—each one of these was made for a special use. The great Sacrifice of the Mass was the one end of their creation —the Mass and the Blessed Sacrament; the choir with its high altar for the solemn functions of the Church, and smaller altars in every nook dedicated to a number of saints, at which each one of the numerous confraternity attached to the Benedictine minster might say his daily Mass. And the Mass from the Catholic standpoint is the most useful thing on earth. It is the most solemn act of adoration ever performed by man in the presence of God. It is the most potent prayer which has ever ascended to the heavenly throne, and prayer is the only means of obtaining God's favours and blessings. He has said it, and can we doubt it? The age doubts it, but is it reasonable to do so? Our Catholic forefathers never doubted it, and therefore they did well to give it the place of prominence, and to build those glorious minsters for the Mass. To them, at least, it was a work of transcendent utility.

The eighteenth-century method of utilising the cathedrals was different. In Catholic times the clergy existed to offer Masses and reconcile sinners; to pray, and teach, and lead souls to God. They were compelled to live pure virgin lives in order the better to devote themselves to God's service. Under the new religion they were allowed to marry, but no longer required to pray. They offered few prayers, but had

large families. Their domestic cares took the place of zeal for souls, and their wives and children became the most important features in English clerical life. Nevertheless, as the clergy had but a life interest in their benefices, there were frequent cases of destitution among their families. Many were improvident and some died suddenly, and thus the wives and children of the Anglican clerics were frequent objects for charity. The festival of the Three Choirs devoted its collections and proceeds to relieving the wants of these unfortunate persons, and thus the three cathedrals were utilised to serve the wants of eighteenth-century Protestantism.

The century of Tillotson paid but little deference to the consecrated edifices; and the cathedral dignitaries not only granted the choir to the artists and singers who assembled from London and the provinces to perform the sacred oratorios, but likewise permitted balls to be held in the old refectory of the monks, turning their venerable chapter-house into a supper-room for the occasion, and at the same time carpeting the cloisters as promenades for the dancers. This was all in strict accordance with the objects of the festivals, as it tended to perpetuate them by furnishing fresh supplies for their funds, since one-half at least of the young beaux on their promotion were juvenile parsons seeking helpmates for their respective parsonages.

The Mowbrays, like many other county families, established themselves in Worcester for the purpose of attending the concerts and balls. The musical festival was regarded as the one occasion upon which Catholics as well as Protestants might claim a common interest in the old structure. There was nothing in the performances which was supposed to be of a nature to debar good Catholics from attending it, for none of the audience seemed to consider them as acts of worship. Nevertheless, the desecrated structure had probably never in its days of desolation re-echoed to any sounds of prayer and praise more complete than those of Handel's oratorios.

So at least felt Madeleine de S. Pol, as she rose with the rest of the company during the famous "Hallelujah Chorus." She listened in rapture to the music, and was far too absorbed in the performance to heed the eyes which were fixed upon her. During the half-hour between the parts of the oratorio, the bishop's palace, the deanery, and the canons' houses

opened their hospitable doors to the *élite* of the audience, inviting them to partake of refreshments.

Madeleine was clinging to Mr. Mowbray's arm, and passing through the green, when she heard herself addressed by a well-known voice:

"Madeleine de S. Pol allow me to escort you. You are going to the palace to luncheon. Mr. Mowbray will allow me the honour of offering you an arm, as he is already embarrassed by the crowd, and has the honour of another lady to pioneer."

"Excuse me, my lord," said Madeleine, turning towards Lord Shelsley with a look expressive of her annoyance, "I prefer keeping by Mr. Mowbray."

"Then I will relieve Mr. Mowbray of his other fair charge," he pursued, politely bowing to the Squire, and offering his arm to Mrs. Mowbray.

Being one of the county magnates, he conducted Mrs. Mowbray to the place of honour at the Bishop's luncheon table, and insisted upon Madeleine and Mr. Mowbray coming up to a place by his side. His conversation was always lively and agreeable, and Madeleine was forced, despite herself, to take part in it, and to become absorbed in its fascinations. The half-hour was soon over, when his lordship rose to re-conduct his charge to her seat in the cathedral. As they were about to leave the table Frank Wyvil came up, and spoke to the Mowbrays and Madeleine. Meanwhile the Bishop's wife asked Mr. Mowbray to escort her back to the church, so that it became incumbent upon Frank to offer his arm to Madeleine, a privilege of which he was not slow to avail himself.

"Ah, Mademoiselle de S. Pol," he said, determined to make the best of his opportunity, "you cannot think how miserable I have been ever since I last saw you."

"You looked very happy then," she ventured. "What could you desire more than a beautiful young lady leaning on your arm?"

"If it were the one whose arm now leans on mine, well and good—I am in Paradise. But Miss Pendrell and her sister were two daughters of a squire who was staying at the same boarding-house at the Wells, and who asked me to accompany them to finish a sketch. How could I refuse?"

"Impossible to refuse so charming a young lady," returned Madeleine sarcastically.

"I might have done so, but it is a weakness of mine to be polite to ladies, and yet I have never admired but one—never."

"Is that true? You must excuse my doubting it."

"At all events, my conscience is clear on this point," returned Wyvil with apparent earnestness, and looking into her eyes, "that I have never in my heart deviated from what I said to you on that Sunday after Mass, as we sat together upon the wooded knoll with the beautiful prospect before us. I have not forgotten, and shall never forget, that moment of perfect bliss."

"Halloa, Wyvil," exclaimed Lord Shelsley, looking round, and perceiving his lover-like demeanour, "you are too bad, I declare. My friend, Frank Wyvil," he continued, addressing Mrs. Mowbray, "is the most arrant flirt in Christendom. I never knew such a fellow. At all events, I hope, Mademoiselle de S. Pol, you will not be taken in by him, and will do me the honour to open the ball with me to-night."

Frank turned crimson, and began to think how he could pick a quarrel with his host (for he was staying at Whitefield), and call him out.

"Come, come, Frank," pursued his lordship, patting him on the back and laughing, "don't be put out with a joke. But jesting apart, it is I who am the aggrieved party, as Mademoiselle de S. Pol can testify."

"I am afraid I am engaged to dance with——" returned Madeleine hesitatingly.

"With me—you are engaged to dance with me," exclaimed Wyvil boldly.

"With Mr. Wyvil," said Madeleine faintly.

The fact is, that much as she would have desired to avoid either dilemma, she at once perceived that it would be fatal to her to open the ball with Lord Shelsley after his conduct towards her at Bath.

Lord Shelsley gave an angry scowl at Wyvil.

"I claim my privilege, Wyvil. I trust you will not stand in my way, and will allow Mademoiselle de S. Pol to be my partner."

"Oh, indeed! I have known Mademoiselle de S. Pol longer

than your lordship, I believe, and I will not forego my claims to Mademoiselle de S. Pol's hand for any man on earth."

"Then we will settle our quarrel elsewhere," retorted his lordship, completely losing his temper.

"Please do not let me be the cause of a quarrel between you!" cried Madeleine.

"She had better not dance with either," said Mrs. Mowbray.

"Certainly not," pursued Madeleine; "indeed I will not go to the ball at all, unless you both promise me not to pursue the quarrel further."

"So your dispute, gentlemen, will lose Madeleine her evening's amusement, for I am certain she will adhere to her intention, unless you come to some agreement," added Mrs. Mowbray.

"I will only go to the ball on condition that you make friends, and that neither of you invites me to dance."

"Come, gentlemen, that is a good bargain. So shake hands," said Mrs. Mowbray, "or you will deprive poor Madeleine of a pleasure which she so seldom enjoys."

They were thus compelled to capitulate, and Madeleine went to the ball.

Among the guests at this county festivity were the Pendrells of Hallowcliffe, who had brought with them a neighbour with whom they had lately become intimate, namely, the same Miss Nancy of Oddingley whom they had met in the lane. By a strange coincidence, as Frank Wyvil found his way into the chapter-house, where the ladies were seated at the supper-tables, he noticed that Madeleine was sitting next to Miss Constance Pendrell, and in order to show her how purely platonic was his friendship for the latter, he approached and introduced them to each other.

"You were at Malvern, I think?" inquired Madeleine.

"Oh, yes, and I am sure I saw you. I knew you again directly," returned Constance. "You were staying at that beautiful old house by little Malvern Priory."

"Yes. I think you were with Mr. Wyvil—did you know him well?"

"We met him at Malvern, I had never seen him before. He is very agreeable, I think; don't you?"

"Umph! Do you live near Malvern?" rejoined Madeleine, waiving the question of Frank's charms.

"No, quite on the other side, near Wych—at Hallowcliffe."

"Ha! then you are near Hartlip, and Boughfield, and Evelench?"

"Yes; at least not far from Hartlip," returned Constance, who had long been anxious to gain admission into that ancient mansion. "Let me see—Evelench—where is that?" she pursued.

"Evelench!" exclaimed Nancy, who was listening eagerly to their conversation, "that is close to Oddingley. Do you know, Evelench, miss? Then you must be the young lady that was robbed of the trinkets."

"Did you hear of that?" inquired Madeleine in a low voice, horrified lest the loud tones of Miss Nancy should direct the attention of their neighbours to herself.

"Yes, indeed. It was the talk of all the village. Some say that desperate Captain had a hand in it, or knew all about it."

"Do you mean Captain Evans?"

"They say he did."

"Then I can vouch for the untruth of such a rumour, for it was mainly through his efforts that I got them back—all but one or two."

Madeleine was much pleased with Constance, who, on her part, was enchanted with the lovely foreigner, whom she presented to her father. Later in the evening Madeleine found an opportunity of introducing Mrs. Mowbray to the Pendrells, thus breaking down the sort of barrier that existed between them. It was very unusual in those days for families in the position of the Pendrells to be on visiting terms with their Catholic neighbours, but, nevertheless, this introduction resulted in Mr. Pendrell's inviting the Mowbrays to Hallowcliffe to dine and spend the night, a civility of which they gladly availed themselves.

Madeleine dexterously avoided any *tête-à-tête* with Lord Shelsley, but as she was passing through the cloisters with Mrs. Mowbray—Mr. Mowbray having gone in search of their sedan-chairs—Frank Wyvil caught sight of them and placed himself at their service.

"May I go to Mass at Boughfield next Sunday?" he inquired of the elder lady.

"Certainly. Our chapel is open to all Catholics."

"Would the old Squire give me a bed?"

"I daresay he might."

"You see it is so hard to get away from a Protestant house like Whitefield early in the morning."

"Then come by all means, if it is to save you from missing Mass."

"Is Mr. Wyvil afraid of Lord Shelsley's sneers?" inquired Madeleine significantly.

Frank bit his lip and coloured deeply at this home thrust from the lips of the object of his secret adoration.

"Mademoiselle de S. Pol, you are very hard upon me."

"Human respect is a very common foible," she returned calmly; "we are none of us saints."

Mr. Mowbray had now joined them, and was hurrying the ladies to their chairs.

"Good night, Mr. Wyvil," said Mrs. Mowbray as she was departing. "Then I am to tell my father-in-law that you will sleep at Boughfield on Saturday?"

"Thank you; no. I will go over from Whitefield on Sunday morning," he said, as he bowed to Madeleine, whose parting look was more gracious than any she had vouchsafed him since their *tête-à-tête* three years before.

On the following Sunday Frank appeared in the chapel at Boughfield in time for Mass.

CHAPTER XIII.

FRANK WYVIL'S TREASURE TROVE.

ON a bright September day, some two years after the events described in our last chapter, a party of four or five sportsmen were seated under an old gnarled pollard in the midst of a meadow in a farm called Netherwood. The name of the farm evidenced to its primitive woodland character as a portion of that once afforested district of the royal chase of Feckenham. It lay in a basin of which the surrounding uplands were still fringed with extensive coverts. The Trench Woods extended along the line of hills bounding the eastern side of the valley, whilst other oaken thickets equally famous as fox preserves, flanked its southern extremity. The shooters had propped their fowling-pieces against the broad trunk of the oak, and were engaged in doing justice to their hard-earned luncheon of bread and cheese and perry, whilst their setters were reclining under the eye of the keepers, shaded by the back branches.

"We have done pretty well for birds," observed Lord Shelsley, turning to the head-keeper, "but I thought you would have a better show of hares in these low lands, Spriggins. There ought to be good lying for hares under these woods."

"Dang it, my lord, and so there would but for them darned paths through the Trenches and the foxes as plays the dickens with us. They eats off all our leverets in the spring of the year. And then there be a sight of poachers in Sale Green."

"You should be a match for the poachers, Spriggins."

"So I be in our wood, my lord; but my Lord Shrewsbury's coverts a'n't half preserved, and as there be no partition between the woods, what can I do, my lord? Them scoundrels as your lordship may have heerd tell on lay hid in the woods and scoured all his preserves clear of game. The Captain can tell your lordship about 'em, and 'll bear me out, I'll be bound."

"Well, my lord, I did my best to rid your woods of that pestilence," said Captain Evans, who was amongst the party. "Since I fired that stray bullet from my window we have heard no more of the gang in our neighbourhood."

"I have heard wonderful tales of the robbers' cave in the Trenches. Can you tell me anything about it, Evans?" inquired his lordship.

"By Jove I should like to go and see it!" exclaimed Frank Wyvil, who had risen from his luncheon and was preparing to resume his gun.

"It lies in the thick of Lord Shrewsbury's coverts, at least so they tells me," replied the keeper. "What was it, Jim, as you was telling me about that gal from Sale Green?"

"She was nutting in the woods only t'other day, and came upon some briars where she seed smoke a-coming out among them, as it might be from underground."

"Then there are robbers there now, depend upon it," returned the peer.

"How far is it from here?" asked Wyvil.

"Oh, sir, not above three parts of a mile," rejoined the keeper.

"I'll go and have a look," replied Frank. "Shrewsbury is a friend of mine. I should not mind trespassing on his manor, especially to do him a good turn."

"Dang it! you had better not venture alone, or they'll make short work of you," cried the Captain.

"I'll go too," said a young cousin of his lordship's.

"There be a couple of coveys in yon clover piece, my lord," exclaimed the keeper, afraid lest these enthusiasts should go off before the day's sport was over.

"Yes, we must not break up our party before we have done a little more execution."

"All right; I suppose we shall end with those stubbles under the covert, and then I can sidle off into the woods and

make my way round by the lanes to Wych in time to meet the phaeton."

Lord Shelsley assented to the proposal, and even offered to accompany his friend, as the road would be as short a cut to the town where they had left their equipage as any they could follow.

After a successful day's sport they dismissed their attendants with the game, and followed a narrow pathway into the covert, Captain Evans and Jim being their pioneers.

Frank Wyvil's interest in the search was heightened by a vague recollection of Madeleine's lost trinkets, and a recollection that their loss had been connected with the outlaws of the Trenches. He had had some conversation with Captain Evans on the subject, and the latter, knowing that Wyvil was a Catholic, and building upon the popular notion that a species of clanship exists among co-religionists, had made up his mind that there was some indescribable link between him and the beautiful foreigner. This supposition had rendered him more confidential than usual, inducing him to give Frank an account of the robbery and recovery of the jewels.

Since his interview with Mademoiselle de S. Pol at the festival, Wyvil had made no advance in his attempt to win her affections. She felt that she had unconsciously given him more encouragement than she intended, and to counteract such an impression had retired within her shell and assumed a coldness which had led him to resent her manner towards him. He had more than once determined to throw her over altogether, and, if it were possible, to forget her existence. In the dissipations of London and in visits to his numerous friends in the North of England, he had tried hard to banish Worcestershire from his thoughts, and this was the first occasion on which he had revisited the shire so intimately connected in his mind with the beautiful Madeleine. Lord Shelsley had pressed him to come down to Whitefield for the partridge-shooting, and he had, in a weak moment, accepted the invitation. It was in sheer disgust with his present life and a sort of vague hope that he might fall in with her again and find her changed towards him. The human heart is full of such frailties, for, after all, he had never succeeded in erasing that bright image from his fancy. Associations of Madeleine seemed destined to cross his path upon every occasion. His morning's conversation with

Captain Evans, who had pointed out to him the house at Evelench, was now followed by this mysterious search of the robbers' cave connected with the loss of her trinkets. His heart was never fuller of Madeleine than now, while he was following the party through the tangled pathways in the thicket.

The paths were so narrow that they were forced to walk in single file, and Captain Evans, being an elderly man and somewhat fatigued by his day's sport, occupied the rear, Frank being immediately in front of him. Jim proceeded at a brisk pace, and his lordship followed him almost as quickly.

"They are on the wrong scent," cried Evans; "they should have turned up here to the left."

Frank hallooed after them, but they scarcely appeared to heed him; wherefore, taking the Captain's hint, he turned into the other path with his guide trudging behind him, feeling sure that the others would soon follow. Pursuing their way for about a quarter of an hour, they came to some cross-ways which fairly puzzled the old soldier.

"We must be near the spot," said the latter; "d'ye see these bones? they must be remains of their feasts on the produce of the neighbouring farms."

"Wait here, Captain, while I take a survey of that thicket of briars," returned Frank, as he plunged into a dense copse to the right of the path and was soon lost to sight.

The Captain called out to caution him, but he was apparently out of hearing. The old man waited for some minutes, undecided as to whether to follow him; but when, at length, he resolved upon doing so, he found the thorns so dense that, after advancing a few yards, he retraced his steps, determining to await his return.

Listening in vain for any signal from his companion, he began to feel uneasy about him. Just then he was startled by the report of a gun, shortly followed by a second discharge. The sounds seemed to come from some distance off in the direction taken by Wyvil. The Captain then hallooed lustily, forcing his way as well as he could along a tangled path which seemed to run in a parallel direction to the maze of brambles into which Frank had penetrated. He continued to halloo until he heard voices replying to his call, and presently found himself in the presence of his late companions, who had made a circuit round, and now met him in this dense portion of the covert.

"Halloo! have you seen Mr. Wyvil?" cried the Captain.

"Not I," replied his lordship; "I thought he had gone with you."

"He has fallen into some trap, I fear; he rushed into the brambles, and I cannot for the life of me tell what has become of him. Pray, my lord, did any of you fire a gun?"

"No, but we heard the report, and that made us turn this way. It must have been Wyvil's gun."

"There were two shots fired. By Jove! I hope he has not fallen into the hands of these scoundrels. Let us make for the place."

One of the younger members of the party, the same who had first offered to accompany Frank Wyvil, dashed into the brushwood in the direction pointed out by the Captain, while his lordship and Jim followed after him. The others made an attempt to keep up with them, and after beating about in the bushes for nearly three quarters of an hour, they came upon an open space which Jim declared to be the site of the robbers' cave, and at length, crawling under a dense bush of brambles, the latter exclaimed—

"Here it be; here is the door."

Young Captain Shelsley, his lordship's cousin, followed him, and the rest beat back the tangled mass, and so opened a way into the hole into which the two leaders of the party had already disappeared. A sort of rough ladder enabled them to descend into the chasm.

"Take care not to break your neck. The rundles are half broken," cried young Shelsley. "This is the place, no doubt, but not a soul in it."

They found remains of firewood and rough cooking utensils, carcasses of animals, a foul worn-out mattress, some tattered garments and discarded shoes, a hammer and a few nails, the butt of a blunderbuss, and several shattered bottles and flagons, but not a vestige either of the supposed inhabitants or of Frank Wyvil.

They spent some time in searching the two underground chambers of the subterranean habitation, which they accomplished by means of a light from Jim's tinder box and matches, for even had not the day been on the wane the place was so dark that they could not have investigated its contents by the light of the sun.

"What can have become of Wyvil?" exclaimed his lord-

ship as he came back into the open air. "If they have murdered him, they have not hidden him in the cave, that is certain. Besides, I don't believe there has been a soul in the place for the last month by the look of it."

They vainly tried to track Frank Wyvil's steps, and at length, after another hour consumed in their attempt, they found themselves in the village of Sale Green, at the southern extremity of the wood.

Their inquiries at the village were equally fruitless, and it was then so late that Lord Shelsley perceived that they must give up all hope of returning to Whitefield that night, unless they resolved to abandon the search. Whilst they were deliberating, Jim, who had been skirting the wood in the direction of Netherwood, came running back breathless with a note for his lordship. It was written in pencil, and on opening it he read it and handed it to his cousin.

It ran thus:—

"DEAR LORD SHELSLEY,—I hope you will not have been detained by my adventure in the wood. I will tell you all about it when we meet, but I must go off to Worcester to-night, and will be with you at Whitefield by breakfast-time to-morrow.—Yours truly, FRANK WYVIL."

"Hang the fellow! What can he mean? Who gave you the note?"

"Whoy, that mon, Captain, as works down at the Court. Dick 'Emming I thinks they calls him."

"Didn't he tell ye, Jim, who gave it him?"

"A gemman as was out shooting and 'as gone by Crowle toward Bredcote. It was the gemman as we've been looking for, for he'd got his gun, and was walking along better than an hour ago by Crowle Hill."

The shooters, as may be imagined, were in no amiable mood toward Frank Wyvil as they hurried back to the inn at Droitwich, in order to reach Whitefield for their late meal.

Meanwhile Frank was too engrossed upon his errand of love to give much thought to his host or his companions. He too had searched the robbers' cave, but to better purpose than those who followed in his track, for beneath a heap of bones and rubbish he had found tied up in a bundle of rags

a parcel containing three trinkets, on one of which was a foreign coronet and the letters A. de S. P. Beside himself with joy at this discovery, he had reascended the ladder, and had determined to carry his prize straight to the object of his adoration and lay it at her feet. In order to obtain a light to descend into the cave, he was forced to use the flint of his fowling-piece upon some tinder which he carried in his pocket, and for this purpose he had previously discharged the two barrels. Hence the report which the Captain had heard. Having secured his booty, not entirely forgetting his duty to his companions, he had made his way as well as he remembered towards the spot where he left the Captain. Veering a little to the left, he found an easier exit to the path, which he reached considerably nearer Netherwood than the spot at which he had penetrated the brambles. Proceeding onwards, he soon found himself outside the covert, and after vainly looking and hallooing for his late comrade, he resolved to pursue his way to Boughfield.

At the bottom of the hill he met Dick Hemming, and scribbling a note, gave the man half-a-crown with an injunction to deliver it as soon as possible to Lord Shelsley.

The four-mile walk to Boughfield was soon accomplished, for the fatigue was lightened by the joyful nature of his errand. He was, nevertheless, doomed to disappointment, for Madeleine was absent with the Robert Mowbrays at the seaside. The old Squire received him with his usual cordiality, and pressed him to dine and sleep at the Hall. Father Southworth was there, and to him he confided his discovery. On returning to his room, he wrote a note to Madeleine, and, enclosing the trinkets in a parcel, intrusted them to the Squire, who had occasion to send a box of various articles to his nephew.

He had no difficulty in obtaining from his host the loan of a conveyance to Worcester at daybreak on the morrow, whence he proceeded to Whitefield in time for breakfast.

He was a good deal jeered by his comrades of the previous day on his sudden disappearance, and was forced to acknowledge his discovery to account for his otherwise unaccountable freak.

CHAPTER XIV.

ANOTHER CHANCE FOR THE LOVER.

"EGAD! a greater blow to this country than either Austerlitz or the death of Nelson!" exclaimed Mr. Pendrell, as he sat in his arm-chair over the fire in the dining-room at Hallow-cliffe, with a glass of port wine on the ledge of the dado and a decanter on the high oak mantelpiece above his head.

"What can that be, papa?" inquired Constance, who was engaged in her tapestry work while keeping him company over his after-dinner potations.

"The great Englishman is dead."

"As great as Lord Nelson—who can that be?" she exclaimed. "Do you mean Lord Collingwood? Not the King, I hope?"

"I don't know that I said as great as Nelson, but 'pon my soul I think it would be almost easier to replace Lord Nelson than William Pitt."

"Is he dead?"

"Died yesterday. A terrible blow to the Tories. I suppose Fox's party will come in and make peace with Bony. However, after their victory at Austerlitz and their defeat at Trafalgar, the French will not be over ready to make peace, and the country, to a man, is for the war. The mistake has been in our subsidising those wretched Germans instead of fighting ourselves. However, he was a great man; a very great man, no doubt. So young too, just in his prime, as one might say. We shall have another public funeral no doubt, though I suppose not quite in the style of the grand ovation

of the 8th and 9th, which seems to have been the most magnificent affair on record. Pitt was a great man, a great Englishman, no doubt about it. Poor fellow! he seems to have suffered a good deal in his last illness. His alliances quite failed him at Austerlitz, and that is what broke his heart, and finished him—poor fellow!" So saying, he quaffed off his glass of port and rose to lock up the decanter in the cellarette. Turning quickly round to his daughter, as if a sudden thought had struck him, he exclaimed—

"I hope, Consy, this Papist of yours is not coming to us for Sunday."

"Of course, papa, if she comes to-morrow, she will be here on Sunday."

"You should have asked her for Monday. It will give such scandal if she should want to go off to her own place, and she will kick at coming to church like a decent Protestant."

"Oh, papa, why didn't you think of this before? I never dreamt of anything of the kind."

"One never does think of all the ins and outs. Besides, she is your friend, Consy—your friend. Ten to one she'll bring her priest with her. That'll be a nice kettle of fish to fry in a quondam clergyman's house."

"Oh no, papa, I'm sure she won't. She'd have said so had she meant to bring him. What makes you think she'll do that?"

"They always do, don't they? But we must hope she will not. You have not got your aunt to think who she will ask to meet her. It will be dull as ditchwater for this foreign Marquise without some better parties than the one she had arranged for Tuesday next with your friend the doctor and his wife, old Mr. and Mrs. Rowbottom from Grafton, and those vulgar Parkers from Oddingley."

"It is so difficult to get anybody," rejoined his daughter; "and remember, this party was invited before we knew about Mademoiselle de S. Pol's visit."

"Of course, Consy; but what I mean is that no time should be lost in recruiting a second party, say for Wednesday or Thursday. There are the Philpses of Hanville and Sir Herbert and Lady Lovett who are down at Fontevraud, for I saw him at the 'Hop Pole' in Worcester. And then I really think it would be a capital opportunity of asking the

Hartlip people. We have exchanged calls, and Lord Northwell is a delightful fellow, a thorough gentleman, and most anxious to make himself agreeable. I wonder if they'd come? Your aunt should mention, you know, that the Marquise de S. Pol will be staying with us."

"The Philpses are asked nowhere and the Lovetts scarcely ever dine out. We might ask the Northwells, but I should doubt their coming. There are the Melshrubs at Hanville Rectory."

"You always fix on clergymen, Consy."

"Yes; but surely Mr. Melshrub is superior to the generality of our neighbours, and almost always has pleasant people in his house. The Sturts were with him a short time since, with the most marvellous child of eight years old I ever saw. Mr. Melshrub is quite a man of the world, and would not at all object to meeting the Northwells, or any of them."

"As you please, Miss Tyrant. You always get your own way, don't you, Consy? If you ask Mrs. Melshrub to bring all the guests who may happen to be staying with her, we shall be saved a peck of troubles, and our party will be made up."

About ten days after the above conversation, profiting by some unusually lovely weather at the beginning of February, which even caused the premature appearance of some primroses in the wood at Hallowcliffe, the two beautiful maidens might have been seen sauntering through that delicious dingle gathering a nosegay of primroses.

Madeleine had developed into the loveliest young woman of two-and-twenty it is possible to conceive, and such was the mingled naïveté and brilliancy of her manner, that none of the masculine, and but few of the feminine sex, were able to resist her sway. Constance was charmed with her, and as to Mr. Pendrell, he owned himself a victim to her fascinations. The parties had gone off, but neither the Lovetts nor the Northwells had been able to avail themselves of the Hallowcliffe hospitalities. The Melshrubs, too, had been engaged on the day for which they were asked, but professed their intention of driving over shortly.

The oaks in the dingle at Halloweliffe were interspersed with magnificent yews, and there was a tradition among the Holmdens that, about a century before, it had been a grove

of yew trees, and that the oaks had been planted amongst them. There were, nevertheless, around the pool in the centre of the sylvan retreat some grand old pollards, which had certainly weathered the storms of centuries, and dated back to a period long anterior to the advent of the Holmden family, who had settled at Hallowcliffe about a hundred and fifty years before. One of these was a hollow oak with a seat in it. Being situate on the brink of the lake, it was the favourite resort of ardent anglers, whose patience in sitting there hour after hour was not unfrequently rewarded by a large carp or an occasional tench out of its deep but not very translucent waters. Beneath this hollow tree lay a punt, the only attempt which had been made at navigation, tied to a stump upon the bank.

"Do you ever row across the pond in that punt?" inquired Madeleine of her friend.

"I have been in it with James when he is at home."

"Let us try our skill," cried Madeleine, as she set her foot in the clumsy boat; "I can row it with that oar, I am sure."

"I dare not trust you," replied Constance.

"Why not? I am quite able to steer you across. I have often rowed the punt at Boughfield. Come along and let us try. I am sure it is perfectly safe."

Constance hesitated, but her companion was not to be daunted.

"I will show you," she said, "how well I can do it." And suiting her action to her speech, she pushed off with the pole into the deep water, heedless of the rope by which it was fastened. This was attached to a bulky stump entirely rotten at the base, which snapped off by the shock which it received. The weight was so great as to overbalance the frail skiff, which instantly filled with water and sank, leaving its fair occupant in the pond. Constance uttered a loud scream for assistance, hoping that some one might chance to be within hearing. Meanwhile Madeleine made some efforts at swimming with her arms, but her feet were too much entangled in her heavy skirt to enable her to keep afloat, and she soon disappeared beneath the surface.

Constance screamed and rung her hands in despair, rushing along the side of the water in hopes of finding assistance. The distance from the house was too great to render it likely

that she could call forth any of the servants in time to save her companion from drowning, but there might chance to be a gardener or a labourer within hearing. Scrambling through some bushes, she endeavoured to gain the shortest path to the shrubberies separating the dingle from the gardens. Her dress was caught among the brambles, and she uttered a piercing cry of despair, feeling that her efforts were likely to prove vain. Just then she heard a loud halloo, and could distinguish footsteps approaching.

"Halloa, who is there? What is it?" exclaimed a voice which she seemed to recognise.

"Help! help!" she cried. "She is drowning—Madeleine is drowning in the pond."

"Heavens! where?" shouted the stranger, who proved to be no other than Frank Wyvil.

"Never mind me!" she said, imagining that he might be thinking of extricating her from the briars. "There, there in the water. She upset the punt and is drowning—where you see the floating pole."

In an instant he had plunged into the pond as she rose to the surface for the second time, and swimming to the spot, grasped her round the waist and bore her to the shore.

All this seemed to be the work of a few minutes, and yet while Constance was still seeking to disentangle her garments from the thorns, she found herself surrounded by a party consisting of her father, Mr. Melshrub, and two ladies from Hanville Rectory, who had come over with their guest, Frank Wyvil, on a morning call to Hallowcliffe.

"What is the matter, Constance?" exclaimed Mr. Pendrell.

"Oh, is she saved? Is she alive?" cried Constance.

The landing-place by the hollow tree was invisible from the place where they were standing, and none of the new-comers had seen Frank Wyvil's feat.

"Has Mademoiselle fallen into the pool?"

"Yes, and Mr. Wyvil has jumped in to save her. Go and see, papa, whether she is saved."

The two gentlemen hurried forward to the spot towards which she pointed, and found Wyvil and his charge both drenched with water, and Madeleine lying senseless in the arms of her preserver.

"Let me carry her to the house," he exclaimed. "There is no time to be lost."

"She is too great a weight for you, my friend; let me help you," said Mr. Pendrell.

"No, no, thank you. Show me the shortest way," he said, walking onwards.

"You have lost your hat and coat, Wyvil," observed Melshrub.

"Never mind such trifles. Her life depends upon her being properly treated at once. Send for the nearest doctor, if you like, and let Mr. Pendrell show me the way to the house."

Almost running along the pathway indicated by his host, and up the steep flank of the dingle, they reached the house before the ladies (who had overheard the sound of their voices) succeeded in overtaking them.

"She is alive," said Frank as they entered the hall; "I know she is alive." And he pressed her tightly to his bosom as he bore her up the stairs to the room to which Mr. Pendrell guided him.

By this time the whole household was astir, and ere Constance reached the room, her maiden aunt, Miss Pendrell, the housekeeper and ladies' maids were gathered round the sofa or preparing the bed for her reception.

Frank Wyvil was of course turned out of the room, but stood in the gallery eager to learn how she fared.

"Thank you, Mr. Wyvil," said Constance with tears in her eyes, as she warmly shook his hand and quickly passed into the chamber.

"Come, Wyvil," said Melshrub, "you must think about yourself, my friend. You will catch your death of cold. These ladies have brought up your coat and hat, but we must get Pendrell to lend you a change of clothes, or you'll get a cold to a certainty."

"Not I," returned Frank; "I'm accustomed to a wetting."

At that moment a maid came out of Madeleine's room, and Wyvil immediately accosted her, inquiring how she then was, and adding, "Is Mademoiselle de S. Pol's maid with her? Let me say a word to her."

The French maid appeared, and spoke with some alarm about the state of her mistress.

"Shall I go over to Boughfield and inform Mrs. Mowbray?" he asked eagerly. "Is she in danger?"

"God forbid that she should be in a state to cause any

alarm!" replied the maid in an agitated voice; "but please, sir, wait a minute while I see."

The minute was prolonged to half an hour, and all that time Frank Wyvil persisted in remaining near her door, regardless of his dripping clothes.

"She is very weak and ill, but has recovered her senses. Yes, sir, she would like to see Mrs. Mowbray. But you cannot go in the state you are in; you will catch your death of cold."

"Never mind me; I'll manage it," he said. And without waiting to hear her protestations, he went straight down to Mr. Pendrell's room, and calling him aside, asked him to lend him a horse to go to Boughfield.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed his host; "you are not going off in your present plight. My good friend, why, after saving the girl's life at the risk of your own, you seem bent upon committing suicide unless you will change your clothes at once. Come along into my dressing-room, and I'll get you a glass of brandy whilst you strip off those wet garments of yours. No apology, my friend, come along."

Despite of himself he was conducted to a warm room, and forced to change his clothes and drink a tumbler of hot brandy and water.

Mounted on an old horse of Mr. Pendrell's, and furnished with some directions touching his route, he rode along the tortuous and somewhat complicated lanes in the hopes of reaching Boughfield by a short cut. He knew the way to Oddingley, but found some difficulty in persuading his rough and ungainly steed to follow the course upon which he was bent. He had not gone far before the clouds, which had long been threatening, descended in a torrent of rain and sleet, which in that leafless season, when no shelter could be obtained from the profuse hedgerow timber, soon wet him to the skin. What with the unmanageable nature of his horse and the impracticable character of the roads, he found the task which he had undertaken more arduous than he had anticipated. He looked in vain for some barn or shed in which to protect himself from the driving downpour, but ere he reached the village of Oddingley the rain had well-nigh ceased. A cold shiver now came over him, and he felt all at once utterly powerless in his seat. He perceived that it was absolutely necessary that he should take refuge in

some farmhouse to dry his clothes and warm his frozen limbs, for even if his beast had been capable of galloping along the rutty thoroughfares, he had no longer strength to urge it forward. Remembering the way to Captain Evans' farm, he bent his steps thither.

Miss Bankes received him with her usual offhand hospitality.

"The Captain's down at Wych," she said, "but he'll be back soon. You'd better have a sup of hot cider or a drop of Hollands, and put on my brother George's clothes, if you can get into them, while I hang yours before the kitchen fire to dry a bit. My stars, you're all of a shiver; as blue as starch, I declare. I'll get the spare bed ready and warm the sheets with the pan. You'll get your death if you don't mind, sir; that you will. Come along."

In truth he could scarcely speak for shivering, and almost unconsciously allowed himself to be conducted upstairs as soon as the fire was lighted and the bed prepared for him.

Miss Kate acted the part of nurse to perfection, and he soon found himself in a warm bed trying to drink the cordials which she pressed upon him, but which were rejected almost as soon as swallowed.

"It is a sort of a fever that's on him, I'm thinkin'," observed Kate in reply to the Captain's inquiries that night. "He was raving when I was up just now. It is more than two hours since you sent the boy to Wych, and the doctor is not yet come. I am desperately afraid it'll be a serious job, Captain; that I am. He said something about that horse not being his, and that we should send it back to Squire Pendrell's."

"Ah, by jingo, that is it. Tom said he knew it was Squire Pendrell's beast. The boy should have ridden it to Hallowcliffe when he went for the leech. I wish you'd told me sooner, Kitty."

"How should I know? He only told me this an hour ago, and I didn't know but what he was raving then."

"I don't know how he can have come by the Squire's horse, for he is one of these Catholic gentry who stay at Boughfield, that is when he is not with my Lord Shelsley. He is often along with his lordship. He was shooting here last season, and a tidy gentleman he is too, and a capital

shot into the bargain. But now what are we to do with him? I hope he won't die in my house, by gad. That is the worst turn a man can do either friend or foe. He should have gone to the Parson's and died there. That would have been a joke—a Papist dying in Parson Bony's house."

"The Parson hates a Papist, I believe," said Kate.

"Ay, and he'd have had the priest in to see him—a great deal better fellow than our parson, Kitty, that's certain. I wish there were some Inquisition, or something of that sort, to burn our Oddingley Bony, and hasten his journey to the nether regions; that I do."

"Well, if it be Mr. Pendrell's horse," replied Kate, "it's certain he must have come from Hallowcliffe, and we had better let George mount him and ride him back, and let 'em know that the gentleman is lying ill in our house. They'll tell us what to do with him. He can't be moved to-night, however, that's certain."

"It's near ten o'clock; better wait till this doctor comes, and send George in the morning," rejoined the Captain. "It is raining hard, and the roads are bad."

The Droitwich Æsculapius seemed to be aware of these difficulties, for he did not appear until the following day.

Meanwhile Kate's patient passed a restless night in a state bordering upon delirium. The fever increased, and he fell into alternate fits of shivering and burning heat. Whatever the outward panoply which enveloped Kate Bankes' nature, she was kind-hearted enough at the core, and watched over poor Wyvil with the utmost tenderness and assiduity.

The horse was sent back at break of day, and Mr. Pendrell rode over before breakfast and found his friend in the hands of the doctor, who had arrived only a few minutes before. The latter dissuaded Mr. Pendrell from seeing the patient, as he considered that all excitement should be avoided, and that perfect quiet was essential. In his ravings Miss Bankes had heard him utter the name of Madeleine, and although she readily connected it with the former inmate of Evelench, she was unaware that the lady was then staying at Hallowcliffe, and consequently did not think of mentioning the circumstance to Mr. Pendrell, or that gentleman might have been able to have afforded relief to the fever-stricken brain by the information that Mademoiselle de S. Pol was decidedly better.

The Squire of Hallowcliffe continued to call daily to inquire after the patient, and reported his condition to his fair guest, who, notwithstanding her feeble state, took a lively interest in the tidings. She was sufficiently convalescent to write an account of her adventure to her friend Mrs. Mowbray, who drove over to see her, and after a few days conveyed her in her carriage to Boughfield. Young Mr. Mowbray and Father Southworth visited Frank Wyvil, and found him suffering from a species of rheumatic fever, which reduced him to a state which led the Worcester physician, whom they sent over, to feel doubts as to his ultimate recovery. While he lay between life and death the good priest administered to him the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, and from that moment he appeared to revive.

During the worst stage of his fever it was necessary that a nurse should be in constant attendance. Kitty Bankes sat up with him for several nights, but the Captain insisted upon her calling in some additional help, as this nocturnal watching combined with her daily avocations appeared to tell upon her health. Evans pitched upon Elizabeth Hemming as a suitable person to assist his niece in her task, and that young woman was glad enough to accept of the offer. She proved a most attentive nurse, and Frank Wyvil benefited by the change; for, however zealous Miss Bankes might have shown herself, there was an offhand roughness in her manner which could not but grate upon the sensitive nerves of the invalid. Elizabeth, on the contrary, was gentleness itself, and unremitting in her care and in attention to his slightest wishes.

As he grew better he conversed with her, and drew from her some account of her domestic history, which did not impress him favourably towards her husband. One evening when she returned from Droitwich he observed that her eyes were red with weeping.

"What is the matter with you, Betsy?" for so he had learnt to call her. "You have had some squabble with that husband of yours, I am sure."

"Never mind, sir," she said, turning to the chest of drawers and busying herself with pouring out his draught.

"Yes, Betsy, but I do mind. You are such a good creature, I cannot bear to see you unhappy. That fellow has been cruel to you, I am certain."

"He is my husband after all, and I have much to thank God for. I am glad I've no children."

"Perhaps he would have been kinder then?"

"Lor', no, sir; he'd have brought 'em up to no good. He ha'n't the same notions like of right and wrong as I was reared in. When I sees some folks as should know better a leading him the wrong way, I thinks perhaps as after all Dick bain't so much to blame."

"What do you mean, Betsy?"

"Well, 'tis best I should hold my tongue, sir. You must not say a word to Miss Bankes or them of anything as I've said, sir. You won't tell her, will you, sir, as you saw my eyes red?"

"Not for the world, my good Betsy; not for the world. But I should like to hear what makes you so unhappy, for perhaps I might do you a good turn, Betsy, and get you into service, where you would be away from them all."

"I have heard tell, sir, that you Catholics have places where women are shut up for life. At times I wish I was one of them; I do."

"You mean nuns; but they are unmarried women, you know."

"I wish I had never married, tho' at first Dick was kind enough until he took to bad company."

"Does he beat you?"

"Not often. 'Tis not *that* I minds the most. The worst is having bad masters. He wouldn't be so bad if those as should be his betters weren't so wicked."

"I thought he worked for Captain Evans, here."

"At times he does."

He tried in vain to sift deeper into the mystery at that period, and indeed he was too fatigued by his conversation to attempt it. When he became a little stronger he was glad to be moved during the day into the cheerful parlour on the ground floor, whence he usually returned to his room towards dusk. One evening in March, after ascending the stairs to his room where Miss Bankes had given him his medicine, he felt restless, and not being able to make any one hear, he groped his way back into the parlour to find a book which he was reading. Not a soul was to be seen in the house. They had apparently all gone out. On reaching the sitting-room, it was so dark that he failed to discover the book, and

groped his way to the sofa, on which he determined to await the return of one or other of his nurses. The exertion had fatigued him and he fell asleep.

He was awakened, after a time, by a conversation in the kitchen, the nature of which induced him to listen to what was said. It was evidently supposed that he was upstairs in his chamber, for the door was slightly ajar, the dark parlour being supposed to be untenanted.

"Dick 'd do for the job," said one of the speakers in a harsh voice.

"George Harris seemed a likely fellow, but he ha'n't the pluck," returned the Captain. "But some of you gents have been blabbing right and left. Our friend Clewes here went and offered fifty pounds at Barber's Public to any man that 'd shoot Bony"——

"Dick's the man for the job," rejoined the first speaker.

"Ay, Captain, you mustn't be too hard on me," replied another voice. "I know what Harris told me. He blabs about it too."

"What did he say to you, Jack?" retorted the Captain, looking cautiously around. "We are all friends here—no secrets, eh?"

"Well, Captain, if that be so," returned Clewes, "he said as you told him plain enough as there was no more harm in shooting the parson than in shooting a crow that flies in the air, and as you swore you would give him fifty pounds if he would shoot him—that he did."

"Freely spoken anyhow," rejoined the first speaker.

"Ay, Barnett, but the fellow lies, blabber as he is. I may have said it to sift him, but not in that way—not in that way, I'll be sworn."

"Your friend Dick is the man, Captain," answered Barnett gruffly, "and no mistake about it."

"Unless his wife should get an inkling of it and peach," put in Clewes. "She is one of your sanctimonious wenches."

"Too good for him, but you may trust him," pursued the Captain. "He is as dark as the bottomless pit when it suits him, I'll be bound. Well, we might do worse than hiring Dick for the job. He likes a dirty job."

"The rub 'll be when it's done," added Barnett.

"Time enough for that when we have got rid of Bony. Fill your glasses and let us drink confusion to the parson!"

At that moment Kate Bankes entered the kitchen in a terrible flurry and hurried the guests away, declaring that they spoke so loud that they would be heard by the patient overhead.

Meanwhile Frank Wyvil remained in a state of terror lest his presence should be discovered, but by some accident no one entered the parlour, of which the outside shutters had been closed; and when the house was wrapt in silence for the night, he crept upstairs and went to bed. On the following day he availed himself of old Mr. Mowbray's pressing invitation to remove to Boughfield, in the gig which they sent for him. Unfortunately, Madeleine was no longer there. She had gone with Mrs. Mowbray to Hartlip.

CHAPTER XV.

THE EASTER BANQUET AT THE PLOUGH.

IN order to picture to themselves one of the main features in this narrative, our readers must remember that Captain Evans' house lay snugly ensconced upon the southern slope of a mound crowned by the picturesque fourteenth-century church of S. James at Oddingley. The little church itself is cruciform, and constructed of the limestone found in its vicinity. At its western extremity is a roofed belfry, and, at the southern angle of the nave adjoining this tower, a picturesque timber porch. Few churches had undergone less transformation since the good old days when Holy Mass had been said within its precincts. It is true that the high altar had finally disappeared in the days of Queen Bess to give place to the table placed within the sanctuary. The damp and musty smell of the Sunday-used fabric harmonised well with its cheerless ritual. Nevertheless, excepting the disappearance of the altars whereon the Eucharistic Sacrifice had been continually offered to God, there was, strange to say, no great change in the other fittings of this mediæval building. The seats were almost as old as the church itself, and the stained glass windows recorded divers pious invocations on behalf of those souls in Purgatory for whose benefit a chantry had been founded in the southern transept.

Among the base uses to which this sacred fabric had been consigned, there was probably none less conformable to the intentions of its founders than the meeting held within its walls on Easter Monday, 1806, which went by the name of the Church Meeting. It was, in fact, the annual assem-

blage of the ratepayers of the parish to pass the parochial accounts and to elect churchwardens and overseers for the coming year. As there was no regular vestry attached to Oddingley Church, this meeting was convened in the southern transept, the Parson acting as *ex officio* chairman. It is possible that in former days these meetings may have been inaugurated by some attempt at divine service, Easter Monday being one of the festivals retained in the Book of Common Prayer. However, if this laudable custom had ever obtained, it had long been dropped, and the gathering was as purely secular as any metropolitan vestry meeting.

The farmers and principal ratepayers lounged into the churchyard, and awaited the arrival of the two magnates of the parish, namely, the Rev. George Parker and Captain Evans. It was a cloudy day, not altogether free from the influence of the prevailing easterly gales so usual at that season.

"Good morning, Master Barnett," said Farmer Perkins; "I hopes this 'ere business won't last long, for I've got my team at work. I wish as the wind 'ud shift its quarter, for we wants a drop of rain on my stiff lands to make 'em work."

"Of course it'll last," returned John Barnett; "we shan't do no good while this 'ere parson robs the best of all our crops and kine. That be worse than east wind—it's a wind that blows nobody no good, that's my opinion."

"Better make terms with him, I'm thinking," returned the other; "better take his terms and pay him for the barn."

"Confound him—not I" ——

"Here he comes," replied Perkins, "along with Hurcott."

"A Jacobin of your own sort," rejoined Barnett huffily.

While they spoke George Parker walked past without saluting any of the party, and entered the porch. Hurcott, who had been by his side, turned round, and nodding his head to one or two of the farmers about the entrance, shook hands with Master Barnett before the latter had time to consider whether or no he would return his salutation.

"Halloo, boy!" cried Barnett to a youth standing by the gate, "go and tell the Captain that we be waiting for him; run along, that's a good lad."

Meanwhile the Rector took his seat in the transept, and, addressing Farmer Hurcott, who had followed him into the church, said:

"Let us lose no time, Hurcott. Hand me the overseer's accounts. Pardoe," he pursued, addressing the parish clerk, who was in close attendance on the Rector, "have you got the overseer's book?"

"This be it, your honour."

The Parson carefully scrutinised the contents of the quarto volume which was placed in his hands, whilst by degrees the prime paymasters of the parish, the two Barnetts, Thomas Clewes, Mr. Jones, Mr. Green, and finally the Captain himself, sauntered into the transept and took their seats without any token of recognition or sign of deference to the reverend gentleman in the chair.

"Umph!" exclaimed George Parker snappishly, and addressing himself solely to Farmer Hurcott, "this will never do. I see an entry here for a dinner at the Plough Inn at Tibberton—a farmers' dinner, I presume—charged upon the parish rates; monstrous and quite illegal! Would you make the poor ratepayers of the parish defray the cost of a sumptuous banquet enjoyed only by a select number of well-to-do farmers? Unheard-of piece of injustice! Enough to bring down a curse upon the parish. I object to this item."

"We will put it to the vote, Mr. Parker," retorted Barnett, suppressing his indignation.

"Yes, gentlemen," exclaimed Captain Evans, rising from his seat, "we will put it to the vote. It shall be for you, gentlemen, to decide whether the good old customs of this parish are to be henceforth utterly trampled down and ignored. We live in days when the Jacobins are seeking to uproot all our old habits and traditions, and to give us their new-fangled revolutionary ideas in their place. Some electioneering gents of the Jacobinical party would turn us all topsy-turvy if they could. We got on very well as our fathers did before us, paying our way—ay, paying our tithe too without dispute or molestation, until a new, low-bred, money-grubbing policy crept in"——

"Order! This is no place for politics," cried the Parson. "This is a question of an illegal charge in the overseer's accounts, and I protest against any extraneous matters being brought into the discussion."

"Politics, indeed!" returned the Captain; "I am talking of our own parish matters at a parish meeting."

"You should confine yourself to the question before us."

"That question, sir, is whether we shall adhere to an old-established custom—a custom which existed long before the tithe was raised in kind, and we were robbed wholesale of our produce by a Jacobinical policy—a policy of spoliation and confiscation worthy of the French revolutionists and of Bonaparte himself."

"Silence!" shouted Parker, who was almost beside himself with rage; "I am chairman here, and I will not suffer such language in my presence."

"In your presence, Master Parson!" muttered John Barnett. "Why, you was not so dainty when you came to filch my milk t'other night, and to carry off my eggs in your reverence's basket. With all the goodly cheer you gets out of us you needn't grudge us poor farmers one meal a year out of the rates, I'm thinking. 'Tisn't much we gets to keep up our spirits in these bad times."

A general laugh was the response with which the assemblage greeted Farmer Barnett's words.

"You'll rue your laughter if I bring this matter before the Justices at Petty Sessions. It is an illegal charge, and I shall use my privilege as rector of this parish by effacing it from the accounts." And suiting his action to his words, he drew his pen across the obnoxious item.

"Confound you, whoever you be!" exclaimed the Captain, purple with passion. "We are all ratepayers and voters, and I put it to the vote. Gentlemen, shall that charge remain on the book or shall it not? Those who say 'Ay' hold up their hands. All—all except the Parson. By gad, the ayes have it unanimously!"

"It is simply a question of law "——

"Law be hanged! We have carried it; and what's more, we'll do it again."

"Ay, that we will," said Clewes.

"That will be for the Justices to decide. I shall take care to make the objection when the accounts are handed in."

"Will you, master? I don't know but what we may be shut of ye before then."

"As long as I am rector of this parish the law shall be obeyed."

"It is the overseer's book, ain't it?" inquired Marshall.

"Ay," rejoined the Captain. "John Barnett, you see

that the charge be properly reinstated according to the unanimous vote of this meeting."

"That I will."

"Now let us pass the rest of the accounts. Has any one any more objections to offer?" inquired Evans, coolly assuming the chairmanship in defiance of the Rector. "No objection; then I declare the accounts passed and the meeting dissolved. Now let us adjourn to the Plough and drink a bumper to our next merry meeting. What say you, gentlemen?"

All the farmers accepted the invitation and followed the Captain out of the church, without seeming so much as to notice the presence of Parson Parker, who soon found himself alone with Perkins, Hurcott, and Pardoe the parish clerk.

"Your honour don't humour them enough," said Hurcott; "they wants a little humouring."

"A set of ill-conditioned rascals. They should have the cat-o'-nine-tails all round if I had my way."

"I don't doubt but what your honour be right about them accounts. I've heard Parson Pendrell and them gentlemen at Wych say as much afore now when I was overseer, but they passed the accounts that time, and said as it oughtn't to appear again on the books. That's what they said, but they've passed it over a sight o' times since then—that they have, I knows."

"Probably none of the parishioners objected; but I defy them to pass it over if I make the objection. It's illegal on the face of it."

"I don't know but what they'll do it again," replied Hurcott; "they be gone off to finish the meeting at the Plough—not that I shall join 'em after what your honour says."

"You had better go, Hurcott, and hear what they have to say. They'll do no good left to themselves. I'd sooner you went, if it were only to make it all open and above board. There's some mischief brewing among them, I'll be bound, and if you and Perkins be there, it will be a check upon the rascals."

"I shan't go, Master Parker; I don't care to be a party to their doings," rejoined John Perkins.

"I wish you to go, Perkins, for my sake; unless you be

there they'll have it all their own way. Come, Perkins, you won't refuse me, for I depend upon you to tell me what takes place—I do indeed."

Thus Hurcott and Perkins, who were considered to belong to the Parson's faction in the parish, were persuaded, much against the grain, to attend the dinner at the Plough Inn at Tibberton. They walked there leisurely together, and on reaching the picturesque wayside hostelry, over-shadowed by tall, wide-spreading elms, and faced by horn-beams neatly trimmed to form an awning to the seats and tables outside the rural tavern, they found the magnates of Oddingley seated with their pipes awaiting the preparations of mine host within the guest-chamber. The arrival of the two hostile paymasters was greeted with a jeer.

"Halloo, Master Perkins! have you come without your friend? We shall have old Bony next," cried Clewes.

"I thought it was a parish dinner"——

"So it be," returned Barnett, "and so it ever shall be."

"You are welcome, both of you," said the Captain graciously. "We are all good friends, I hope. This is no hole-and-corner meeting, but a parish dinner, to which all the good ratepayers of Oddingley are welcome."

"I don't wish to intrude, gentlemen, if I bain't welcome," rejoined Hurcott.

"Nor I neither," added Perkins.

"You are welcome, for that matter," pursued Evans. "Is not this a parish meeting, paid out of the parish rates, at which every honest paymaster is entitled to assist and eat and drink his fill? By Jove, yes—that's just it. Come along, my friends, and make yourselves at home."

Shortly afterwards the landlord appeared to summon his guests to the banquet, whereupon they all entered the house and seated themselves at the dinner-table. There was not much said during the repast, to which all did ample justice, showing their appreciation of the cheer provided by mine host.

Captain Evans' two so-called nephews, George and Henry Bankes, were present. The latter lived away from Oddingley, but was on a visit to the Captain at the time. Thomas Clewes had also brought his brother John, who had been assisting him at his farm. There were likewise two Barnetts, John and William, besides Farmers Jones and Marshall, who

were both considered loyal, though not extreme, members of the farmers' faction in the parish. The only sympathisers with the Parson were Hurcott and Perkins. Thus the party consisted of eleven in all, and the Captain, by unanimous consent and time-honoured usage, occupied the chair.

As soon as the cloth was removed and the wine placed upon the polished oaken board, the chairman rose to propose the usual loyal toasts. He was nothing loath to rise upon his legs and indulge in a kind of coarse after-dinner eloquence, which never failed to elicit the plaudits of his rural audience. His Majesty King George, Queen Charlotte, and the Prince of Wales were toasts which were drunk standing, with three times three, and hip, hip, hip, hooray, till they could shout no longer. Then came the Duke of York and the Army, and the Duke of Clarence and the Navy, and in both of these arms, especially in reference to His Majesty's land forces, the Captain was considered to surpass himself. He indulged in long episodes of his personal exploits in the West Indies, at Gibraltar, and elsewhere. These bursts of eloquence were followed by songs, both sentimental and comic, of a military or naval character, in the refrains whereof the whole company joined.

After several toasts had been drunk, John Barnett, who was beginning to feel the effects of his potations, observed: "We have had the Army and Navy and all the Constitution except the Church. We be all Church and State men here."

"Come, Master Perkins," cried the Captain, "we'll call upon you to give us a toast."

"That's fair, anyhow," said Tom Clewes.

"No, I bain't a speaker—I shouldn't know what to say."

"Come, Perkins, name a gentleman," retorted the Captain. "It does not need a long speech; just give us out a name."

"You knows well enough what the Captain means," said Henry Bankes, nudging him. "Out with it, Master Perkins."

"Not I; I bain't no orator, as they say."

"You have got a tongue, man alive—a gentleman's name, that's all."

"I don't know what ye mean."

"I'll give it for you, then, by gad!" cried the Captain, rising. "Here's Master Perkins' toast. Come, fill your glasses, gentlemen; a bumper this time and no mistake.

Some one said that we had not remembered Church and State. We are one and all staunch Church and State men here, no doubt on it; and better Churchmen, too, than some as think themselves our teachers. We read somewhere of wolves in sheep's clothing. There be bad and good in every line o' life. I have heard even of there being bad parsons, and I daresay some of you may have heard on 'em too." This was followed by a prolonged clatter, intermixed with groans and hisses.

"I don't say but what you may," he continued; "but I won't make any painful or personal allusions. I will merely propose my friend Master Perkins' toast, by doing what he is too shy and diffident to do. I propose 'Church and State,' and for obvious reasons, best known to my audience, I venture to couple that toast with the health—the health, mind you—of Mr. Parker of Oddingley, left-handed—left-handed, my friends; you know what that means." This was followed by roars of applause.

"Come, gentlemen, stand up with your bumpers in your left hands, and drink the toast."

"Not I," said Farmer Hurcott.

"Nor I," cried Perkins.

"Turn 'em out!" shouted Tom Clewes, who was pretty well in liquor by this time.

"You are a Jacobin, Perkins."

"Gentlemen," retorted Perkins, rising indignantly, "Mr. Parker is as good as any of you. I am ashamed of you, Captain Evans, who are a magistrate and should consequently know better, for being guilty of breaking the peace. This young prig here, your nephew, Captain, has called me a Jacobin. I'm no Jacobin, but as good a subject as any on ye; and what's more, I'm prepared to prove it, and I'm ready to fight the best man of ye all to prove that I'm no Jacobin."

"Confound you," thundered the chairman, "you ought to be turned out of the room for not drinking the toast."

"Come, Perkins, don't make a fool o' yourself," said Barnett, tugging him by the arm to force him to sit down. "You mustn't fight here."

"Chair! chair!" cried several voices.

Then followed a terrible uproar, which lasted for several minutes before the chairman could restore order.

"Why, Perkins," said the Captain, as soon as the excite-

ment had subsided; "I'm blest if I know what has come over you of late, for I remember only last autumn when you were in my parlour that you agreed that the Parson was a regular bad 'un, and there'd be no more harm in shooting him than a mad dog."

"'Twas you said that, Captain—not I."

"Ay, but you said Amen to it, by Jove; and there was not a soul in the parish that agreed with me more heartily than you did, that I can swear."

"You said I did, Captain, but 'twas the first I'd ever heard on it."

"You are a rascally turncoat, Perkins. The Parson's got over you, and he and Hurcott have turned you inside out; that's the truth of the matter, and no mistake."

"Why, you peached to some one," exclaimed Clewes, "about having seen me and Dick the wheelwright drinking at the Chequers."

"I peached?" said Perkins; "I did not know there was aught to peach about. I saw you and Hemming drinking, to be sure; and what's more, you paid for the quart of ale, if there were any harm in that."

"Confound you for a spy."

"Come, come," said the Captain, "that's unparliamentary language. Don't let us fall out, Tom."

The company were by that time far gone in their cups, and some of them had showed signs of disappearing beneath the hospitable board. The more sober began to disperse, and among the first to slip out of the room were Farmers Hurcott and Perkins, who were glad to quit the uproarious gathering and to walk home arm-in-arm along the lane to Oddingley. It was a bright starlight night, and the coolness of the outer air in some measure dissipated the fumes in which they had been enveloped.

Although the Captain was one of the last to leave the room, he was probably the least overcome by the effects of their hilarity. He had some difficulty in getting Tom Clewes out of the inn and escorting him across the fields in order to put him in the right direction towards his farm at Netherwood.

He persuaded his young relative George Bankes to assist him in his task, anxious to get him clear of the company, so that his drunken revelations might not alarm the uninitiated.

"I think Timmy's the man for the job," cried Clewes, with a hiccough.

"Hush, you fool," returned the Captain, squeezing his arm as he led him into a meadow to the right of the road.

"A rare good shot, I'll be bound."

"What a blabbing fool you are, Tim."

"No harm, Captain, no harm; no more than in shooting a mad dog or crow, be there, Captain?"

"I'll bind your blarney, Tim, or I'll kick you."

"Down with the Parson! here goes three times three (hiccough) hip, hip, hip, hooray," continued Clewes, deaf to all remonstrances.

By dint of cuffs and oaths they got him through some meadows to a path leading to Netherwood, where not a soul was likely to pass or overhear his drunken speeches, and there they left him to recover his sobriety and find his way homewards before the morning. As they departed, they beheld him seated under an old oak, singing "We won't go home till morning," and so he continued until he fell asleep, to wake at dawn in a more sober frame of mind.

On reaching the Court the Captain was met at the door by Miss Kitty, who sent George off to bed and called the Captain into the parlour.

"Dick has been here all the evening waiting to see ye, Captain."

"Hang the fellow, what does he want here?"

"He says he knows you have got a job for him."

"Let him go to the devil. I'll find him when I've got a job for him. Did you give him some supper, Kitty?"

"Yes, I gave him his supper and sent him to the loft. You don't want to see him to-night, Captain?"

"Not I. I'll see him in the morning. I'll tell you what it is, Kitty; we must make short work of it, or the country'll soon be too hot for us with all those sotted blabbing fools to deal with. I wish the job was well over, that I do."

"A bad job, Captain," returned the young woman; "I'd sooner we were all away from here and quit of the whole concern."

"Ha, by Jove, and you'd have me turn tail and sneak away from a man who has insulted me? It would be a fine triumph for Bony were I to cut and run and leave him cock of the walk. It has gone too far—too far, Kitty, to

back out of it. It is a mortal hand-to-hand struggle between me and that pestilent fellow. One of us must go to the wall, and I'm not the man to give in."

"If Dick 'd do it on his own account and be strung for it I shouldn't care, but if we've a hand in it I wouldn't trust him not to peach. If he came to some untimely end it would be the better for that poor wife of his."

"Dick is not safe, Kitty, I know, and that's why I don't care to see him alone. We must get the lot on 'em into the house, and I'd sooner the whole matter was settled at John Barnett's house than mine. John has got a grudge of his own to settle with the Parson."

"Then let him bear the brunt on it. Don't you go and parley with Dick alone on this here business, but get it settled by John Barnett and his friends down yonder."

"Well said, Kitty! That's my way of thinking, lass. Hanged if I see him! You can give him a job here in the morning at the sawing and splicing over at the dovecot, for I shall be off betimes to Wych. You can engage him at odd jobs for the next week or so, and then we shall know where to find the rascal when he is wanted. I'll see John Barnett to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PIGEON-HOUSE PLOT.

CONSTANCE PENDRELL had formerly been engaged to a young curate of good family, who died in a decline, and had thenceforth avowed her intention of ending her days as an old maid. She devoted herself to good works, chiefly interesting herself in training up village girls for domestic service. There was an old cottager at Hallowcliffe who had a niece named Sarah Rogers, whose father lived at Oddingley. She met her one day at her aunt's and was struck by her good looks. The girl was about seventeen, and displayed signs of intelligence beyond the generality of rustic maidens of her condition. Constance asked her whether she would be willing to go into service, and promised to take an early opportunity of visiting her at her father's cottage.

"Have you ever assisted in any household work?"

"Yes, ma'am, I have helped in Mrs. Parker's kitchen," replied the girl.

"And she will speak for you?" inquired Constance.

"Yes, ma'am, she be kind enough, poor lady, to us poor folk."

"And Mr. Parker; does he visit much amongst the poor?"

"Yes, ma'am, he be kind enough to the poor, though he ain't on good terms with the farmers, and many are afeard to speak a good word for him."

"Well, I hope to call on Mrs. Parker, and I will ask about you, and if possible call at your cottage. Do you live far from the Rectory?"

"No, ma'am, we live in the village close by Farmer Barnett's pigeon-house, if you know that, ma'am."

"Can you read or write?"

"I bain't much of a scholard, ma'am. I went to Dame Wallis's school, but I've mostly forgot what I learned."

"That is very sad. You should learn to read and write."

"I should like to learn, ma'am."

"It is so far to come, or I would teach you—but we will see what can be done. I shall try and go over in a few days to visit Mrs. Parker. I wonder Mr. Parker does not have a proper school at Oddingley."

The girl was delighted with her interview with Miss Pendrell, and returned home rejoicing at the thought that she should soon be taught to read and write, and perhaps obtain a situation in a grand house. She built castles in the air as she rapidly retraced her steps, and her Alascar's vision had already promoted her to be the housekeeper in a stately mansion, when a voice saluted her.

"Halloo, wench, what makes you trip along at such a pace? I want to have a word with you. You be Sally Rogers, bain't you?"

"Yes, sir," she replied timidly; "but I am late. Father 'll be expecting me home."

"Why, ain't you in service, my good gal? You are old enough to be earning. I'm sure your father would be glad to see you placed. You shouldn't be staying at home at your time of life."

"Well, Master Clewes, but I hope to get a place," she replied timidly.

"Hope to get a place. Why, you'd better take one when you find it to hand. Come, Sally, you'll look about a long time before you get better suited than with me. My missus is wanting a gal in the house, and I shouldn't wonder but what you'd soon learn to milk the cows and help in the dairy. Susan Best have left us, tho' she was hired at Martinmas, and have gone off, drat her. I'd ha' sent the constable after her if she'd been worth her salt, but she was the filthiest drab I ever come across, and a good riddance. Come, Sally, no nonsense, gal, it's a bargain—d'ye hear? You come to Netherwood to-night, afore nine o'clock, and you shall have your supper and be took into service."

"I am very sorry, master, but I must beg to be excused, for a lady is looking out for a situation for me."

"Is it not the Parson's wife?"

"No, sir, not her, but the lady at Hallowcliffe."

"Eh! I'll tell you what it is. These grand folks turns the heads of all you gals and spoils you outright. I doubts you soon high, young miss, and wants to be a grand lady's lady, decked out in silks and satins from the missus' wardrobe, like a proud popinjay. Curse the folly of some folks. Who is your father working for now, Sally? Is it the Captain?"

"No, master, he don't work for the Captain. He have worked for Farmer Barnam, but he be doing odd jobs about."

"If he worked for me, I'd make him send you to Netherwood—that I would. He should be ashamed of hisself to let you get such foolish notions into your head about service. Drat it, if it comes to this, we shan't get a servant in the parish, least if we does. Come, Sally, you think better of it, my lass; there's a good lily gal. Come!"

This latter speech betrayed the same coarse familiarity which he exhibited in his manner. She recoiled from this display of admiration even more than from his previous scolding tone, and saying "Good-night," with a curtsy, almost ran off toward the next stile.

Thomas Clewes felt rather huffed by her cavalier treatment of him. He was a strict taskmaster, and one who regarded the cottagers of the parish in the light of serfs created for the benefit of the farmers. The system of yearly hiring at the annual mops gave the farmer a hold over his servants which almost amounted to serfdom. It was reported of Clewes that he occasionally punished lads in his employ by hanging them up by the heels in his stable for more than half an hour at a time. He had no sinister intentions toward Sally Rogers, for whom he felt an unaccountable admiration. His favours, however, were no less to be avoided than his ire, and she was not without a fear lest he might use some influence to induce her father to hand her over to his service.

An hour or so after her return home, where her elder sister was employed in needlework, she heard voices at the garden gate, and to her consternation beheld her father (who

had just come back from work) in close conversation with Thomas Clewes. She was the more alarmed as she knew that her father would be glad to get her into service, and that he was in ignorance of Miss Pendrell's promise.

"O Molly, what shall I do?" she said to her sister. "Here's Master Clewes getting the better of father and handing me over to him, I'll be bound. You go out, there's a darling, and whisper to him that Miss Pendrell has promised me a place with gentlefolks."

Mary was rather shy in the presence of farmers, but she called out to her father: "O father, I wants to have a word with you," as if she had not recognised Thomas Clewes.

"Tarry, girl, while I'm speaking a word to Master Clewes," returned the old labourer.

"I want your sister to come down to Netherwood to-night. It's a rare good place for her. She'll manage the dairy before long."

"But she can't go, Master Clewes," replied Molly, "she can't, indeed; for Miss Pendrell of Hallowcliffe have got a place for her with gentlefolks, and she couldn't go and throw her over. She couldn't, indeed, master."

"When did she hear of this, Molly?" inquired Rogers. "I never heer'd on it."

"To-day, father. She be just come back from Hallowcliffe, that is about an hour since."

"Mind what you're after, Rogers. We farmers hold together, mind ye, and it'll be as much as your place is worth to run in our teeth, I can tell ye, man. You've no business to go and put your children to gentlefolks, when you've a settlement in the parish and we be forced to support you out of the parish rates. D'ye think we're to pay our money to keep a lot of powdered jackanapes and flaunting queans in satin? We want honest servants to work on the farms like their fathers and mothers afore 'em. That we do, and you knows it."

"I'll talk it over with the lass, master, so be as you'll let it stand over for a day or two."

"Come, Rogers, no nonsense. I want the girl at once. You'd better send her off with me. You know well enough what it is, Rogers. I can stop your jobs, if I've a mind. You'd better think twice before offending me."

"I must talk to the lass."

"Talk to her! bless you. Just you send her off with me and I'll talk to her."

Meanwhile Molly had slunk back into the cottage, and, whether warned by her, or alarmed by what she had herself overheard, Sally slipped out through the back door, and stealing into an orchard hid herself behind a high overgrown bramble hedge. There she sat on the brink of the ditch and hearkened in fear and trembling, lest her father and Farmer Clewes should discover her place of concealment. There was a nightingale singing in the orchard, and while she listened to its delicious strains, the time passed rapidly and the May twilight waned gradually into dusk.

"Where are you, Sally?" cried a voice which she recognised as her sister's.

"Here, Molly. Is father gone to bed?"

"Yes, and I have been looking for you ever so long."

"Where's Master Clewes? I hope he be gone."

"Better than three hours ago. Come, child, you'll catch your death of cold now the dew's falling. Let us walk by the pigeon-house."

There was a species of summer-house on John Barnett's farm, separated from his dwelling by the cross-roads, and standing in an orchard not far from the village pound. It is probable that this square brick edifice may formerly have served as a dovecot, but being no longer required for that purpose, and containing an ample apartment with a spacious cider cellar beneath it, an enterprising and hospitably-disposed occupant of the farm had converted it into a guest-chamber in which he and his male friends could indulge in convivialities without disturbing his household. The building in question lay at the lower extremity of the orchard adjoining Rogers' cottage. It was overgrown with ivy, and overshadowed by pear-trees.

As the two girls approached this building Sally exclaimed, "There's a light in the pigeon-house! Let us go home."

"There's singing there or some'at," returned Molly; "let us listen."

They returned towards the gate of their father's garden, and stood against the butt of a tree between that and the pigeon-house.

"Hark! I hear Thomas Clewes' voice. I can swear to it," said Sally.

"Ay, and the Captain's and Farmer Barnett's, I'll be sworn," replied Molly. "How loud they speak! They be drinking toasts."

There were snatches of songs and occasional outbursts of hilarity and cries of Hip! hip! hooray!

"It be something to do with the roll that was had this morning for listing for sodgers, or militia, or some'at, to fight Bonaparte, who be coming over the sea. Come, Sally, let's go home. It's time we was asleep."

The two girls retired to their father's cottage, but just as they were preparing to enter the door the cheers grew louder, and Sally's curiosity prompted her to leave her sister and return once more to the pigeon-house to listen to what was going on. She approached the door of the banqueting-chamber, whence she caught snatches of the conversation, especially distinguishing the voice of her late persecutor Thomas Clewes. There seemed to be at least five distinct voices. At length she clearly overheard some one enunciate the toast: "Death to the Bonaparte of Oddingley!" followed by the injunction, uttered as she thought by Clewes, "Friends, drink it left-handed." They (as she fancied) drank the toast, which seemed to be followed by a discourse in a lower voice, which she vainly strove to overhear. While her curiosity was at the highest pitch, and her ear against the keyhole, a sheep-dog from the neighbouring farmhouse came smelling up against the door and suddenly commenced barking. She then heard a movement in the room, and had scarcely time to rush away when the door opened and two of the men came hallooing out. She recognised Clewes voice, and heard them following her footsteps as she ran toward her own cottage. She had barely time to reach her father's door and close it ere she heard the footsteps of her pursuers in the garden. After repeating what had happened to her father and sister, who were still awake, she extinguished the lights and retired to rest.

"What are those arrant fools doing?" said Captain Evans when Clewes and Marshall had run off in pursuit of the girl.

"Most likely they thought we was overheard."

"Just the way to awaken suspicions. Call them back, John. They must sign this document or put their crosses to it."

John Barnett followed after the fugitives and brought them back to the pigeon-house.

The square chamber in which they were assembled was lighted by a single rushlight which stood on the small deal table at which Captain Evans was seated. On this table were a jug of cider and a huge earthenware mug. The only other furniture of the apartment consisted of a rush chair and a couple of benches.

"Close the door," said the Captain as soon as Barnett returned with the two men. "What did you run off for?"

"There were footsteps sure enough, and we saw a figure in Rogers' garden—one of his girls, I'll be sworn."

"What does it matter? Not a word has been said that we need be afraid of. They all know we have drunk death to Bonaparte, and to-day was 'listing-day for the volunteers. It was natural enough to drink the toast. Now hold your tongues and listen. We are five of us, good men and true, and what's more, I'm a justice of the peace. Now take this Testament in your hands, all of you. Each hold a corner of it, you four, and hearken to my words. 'You and all of you, John Barnett, William Barnett, John Marshall, and Thomas Clewes, swear on the holy Gospels that you will stand by me, Captain Samuel Evans, and by each other, in conspiring to rid this parish of Oddingley of the Rev. George Parker by any means whatsoever which shall be found most ready and expedient, even if it should be at the cost of your own lives, and that you will keep secret and not divulge to any one any word said or deed done by you or any of you or by me, Samuel Evans, or which shall hereafter be so said or done—so help me, God.' Thereupon they each kissed the book, uttering the words "so help me, God."

The Captain then produced a paper, with an inkhorn and pen.

"Now listen. I will read you what you are to set your names to. It's a matter of ten pounds a head from we five, making fifty in all. Fifty pounds will do the job."

"Ay, Dick 'll do it for fifty, I know," said Tom Clewes; "he said as much to me t'other night at the Chequers."

"You are a fool, Clewes, to go and brawl it in the public-houses as you do. You were drunk, no doubt, and told the whole company about it. I heard as much up at Sale Green."

"Anyhow, Captain, Dick 'll do the job."

"And you'll swing for it, if you don't take care; and a good riddance, too, if you was the only one. Well, hold hard and hearken."

"'We the undersigned severally undertake to pay Ten Pounds a head to Captain Samuel Evans on or before the 20th instant.'"

"And you don't say what for, Captain?" inquired Marshall.

"In course not," rejoined John Barnett. "We all knows what for. We might all swing for it if the paper was dropped and found by the constable."

"Why have a peaper at all?" inquired William Barnett. "It's no joke putting pen to peaper on such a matter, to my thinking. It's enough if we all gives our word of honour to the Captain to give him ten pounds apiece to-morrow, or, say, by Monday next."

"Ay, much better nor writing it on paper," added his brother.

"Hang it! well, I don't know! There's a deal in what you say, Bill," returned Evans; "I'd as soon have the money down. Have you got your ten pounds, Tom?"

"Not likely, on a dark night; but I'll bring it ye, Captain, to-morrow, if you take paper money."

"All right, Tom."

"Let us all shake hands on it, and swear to pay the Captain our ten pounds before two days are out. You may count on Bill and me."

"Ay, and on me, Captain," added Marshall; "I'll bring it ye to-morrow before breakfast. I've got it at home."

They bade each other good night; the Captain and Clewes returning homewards through the fields, and the two Barnetts and Marshall retiring to their farmhouses in the village close at hand.

The money was duly paid on the morrow by each of the contributors, and on that same day the Captain and John Barnett came to an understanding with Richard Hemming touching the terrible deed required of him in return for the fifty pounds.

CHAPTER XVII.

ELIZABETH HEMMING.

THE farmers of Oddingley, like many of their neighbours, had been enrolling themselves as volunteers, to be prepared to fight against Bonaparte should he succeed in effecting a landing on our coasts. Captain Evans took a prominent part in this enlistment. As an old soldier he naturally delighted in anything of a military character, especially when, as in this case, it tended at the same time to sustain his reputation or increase his importance in the parish. The pigeon-house meeting had been an adjournment from one at the Plough, where the volunteering had taken place.

Lord Shelsley being a colonel of volunteers, the recruiting was peculiarly active upon his estates, and the old Captain, who was ever ready to curry favour with his lordship, considered himself as his *locum tenens* in this transaction. When he returned home that night Kitty was awaiting his arrival, but she found him out of sorts and less communicative than usual. He responded to her attentions with an oath, and said he wanted to go to bed.

"What's the matter, Captain?" asked the young woman. "Something has gone wrong with ye, I'll be bound. Here's the kettle boiling for your grog. You won't go to bed without that."

"I don't want it; don't bother me. You should be in bed by this hour."

"I had some visitors here this afternoon, Captain. Your foreign Markees came along with our late guest, Mr. Wyvil,

and another gentleman from Hartlip, all mounted on horseback. I don't know what brought 'em, unless to see the place where he was laid up so long, and to have a talk with you, Captain. They was particular in looking all round the place, and I gave 'em some of the old perry, which they seemed to relish. They were riding round the country, and was going on to Hallowcliffe."

"Was that all?" replied the surly Captain, with one of his usual oaths. "It warn't worth your sitting up to tell me that, wench."

"It warn't quite all, and I don't suppose I should have bothered to see you, but for what they said. That Mr. Wyvil (who by the way is desperate sweet upon the Markees; I believe there's something between 'em, I shouldn't be surprised to hear they'd made a match on it)—but as I was about to say, this Master Wyvil did nothing but question me about Betsy Hemming and her husband, and wanted to know all about them, and where they live in Wych. You know she was here a-nursing him when he was sick, and I'm desperately afeard she let out a lot about Dick and his evil ways. I'm sure the gentleman heard more than he cared to tell."

The Captain swore again.

"I daresay, Kitty, you let out a lot more. Did you tell him Dick was in my employ?"

"Not I, Captain; d'ye take me for a born fool? I told him we scarcely knowed the fellow—though they've been putting two and two together, they have, and have come to the conclusion that Betsy's husband was the same man that brought the jewels back to the Markees."

"Is that all? So long as you kept your counsel, I'll be blowed if I see what harm's to come of it, or why the dickens you sat up."

"I am only desperately afraid of their setting the Hallowcliffe folks inquiring about Dick and his wife, and fishing out a lot from them, especially Betsy, who is sure to let the cat out of the bag if she is up to Dick's doings—that she is."

"And Dick hasn't been this way?"

"That's just it, Captain. They might ha' found him down in Wych."

"I'll tell you what it is, Kit. You must let him lie in the loft at night, and we must keep him up here without a soul knowing it. Mind you see to it, lass."

At daybreak on the morrow the Captain called on Farmer Barnett, whereupon the latter sent a message to Hemming to come and do some repairs at the pigeon-house. The two men met him there as if by accident, and after swearing him to secrecy, told him of the job required at his hands.

"What's your wife doing?"

"She be at home."

"Will she be coming after you, up here?"

"She warn't come arter me. She knows better."

"But suppose folks go after her and make inquiries of you, will she blab and tell them where you be, Dick?"

"She don't know."

"But she'll suspect. She knows you work in Oddingley."

"Dang her! I'll quiet her if she blabs."

"That's all very well, but you won't quiet the gentlefolks that she tells her tale to. Did no one go to your house yesterday?"

"Not as I knows on."

"Well, 'twere better she should go away from Wych for awhile; or else be told you are gone away."

"If she were to go, Capt'n, it 'ud only make 'em suspect. You may tell her as I'm gone to Eckington on a job. That'll throw her off the scent."

"You're a good hand, Dick, at a pheasant or a hare; have you ever shot a deer with a bullet?"

"By jingo, your honour, I have done some'at of that in Croome Park. I don't know but what I could make sure o' bagging some'at smaller nor a deer with a bullet."

"Say a Frenchman; could you hit a Frenchman? Come, now, could you hit Bonaparte?"

"I daresay I might."

"We have a sort of a Bonaparte here in Oddingley—they calls him the Oddingley Bony," said Barnett.

"Well, and I don't know but what I'd bag him as easy as a crow," responded Dick.

"Come, no nonsense, Dick. You know well enough what you've got to do. You've heard on it before now, I know. Tom Clewes told me as you did."

"Lor' bless your honour, I knows what you wants on me. You wants me to bag the Parson. Be dazzed if I does, unless so be as I sees the gold afore. Some un else may swing for that job unless you makes it worth my while like."

"You'll have to single out your stag and get him alone. It'll be a hard job to separate him from the herd," observed the Captain.

"It is a fifty pound job, Captain; and I must be sure o' my money afore I takes his life—that I must, Captain."

"You don't doubt my word, man; but I'll tell you what it is, Dick. Here are fifty pounds, and Mr. John Barnett here is witness that I promise to give 'em you as soon as ever you've done that dirty job. Come, shake hands, Dick; is it a bargain?"

"Well, I supposes it be," returned Hemming sulkily.

"Hang it, Dick, what's come of that gun of yourn which Betty Jones found under the rick-staddle in my foldyard?"

"I had him mended by Tom Gore at Meer Green. It be all right now."

"There's a job now in my foldyard, but I'd as lief ye'd do this other quickly. Howsoever, you must bide your time to get him all alone, and in the dusk were best."

Susan Surman, dairymaid at Barnett's farm, testified to having seen Dick Hemming every night and morning during the three weeks preceding midsummer-day 1806, in a field of mowing grass belonging to her master, and separated only by a hedge from the Glebe pasture, wherein Mr. Parker kept cows, which he occasionally drove along the public pathway through that very meadow toward his Rectory House.

The Parkers were fair specimens of a certain section of parsonic families during the eighteenth century. The famous Vicar of Wakefield exemplified the homeliness existing amongst even a better class of incumbents upwards of a century ago, and small outlying parishes like Oddingley continued to be occupied by an inferior grade of ministers to within no very remote period.

Mr. Parker, as has already appeared, farmed his own bit of Glebe, which, thanks to his method of raising the tithe in kind, was abundantly stocked with sheep and cattle from the farms of his parishioners. Adjoining his Rectory House was the spacious tithe-barn which he had erected, wherein were stowed the tenth-part of the harvest of his neighbours. Fowls and ducks in plenty were congregated in his yard, accustomed to receive their daily allowance of barley from the hands of Mrs. Parker herself.

One morning in June as she stood in the yard feeding the poultry, her little daughter by her side, a lady and gentleman on horseback halted before the wicket-gate.

"How do you do, Mrs. Parker?" cried a pleasant voice which she recognised as Constance Pendrell's. "Uncle and I are come to ask you when you intend to pay your promised visit to Hallowcliffe."

Mrs. Parker curtsied to the magistrate and his niece, and after various questions from the former touching her husband, the young lady made inquiries about Sarah Rogers, for whom she thought she had found a suitable place.

"Will you kindly undertake to see her," pursued Constance, "and send her over to Hallowcliffe this evening?"

Mrs. Parker hesitated.

"You don't mind it, I hope," added Constance; "but I am afraid I am giving you a good deal of trouble."

"It is not the trouble that I mind, but oh! Miss Pendrell, if you knew what a set of neighbours we have, and how jealous they are of every little thing I do."

"I suppose they can't be jealous of your taking a message to a poor girl."

Mrs. Parker said nothing, but turned away her head, and Constance perceived tears trickling down her cheeks. Her kind heart was touched, and beckoning the unhappy woman to her side, she whispered:

"What is it you are afraid of? Tell me."

"Of everything and everybody in this wicked place. I am watched wherever I go, and so is my poor husband. Only yesterday as he came out of the house of a parishioner to avoid one of the bad persons who had just gone in, he heard him say there are fifty pounds for any man who will shoot the Parson. And frequently at night gravel has been thrown up against our window in order to bring Mr. Parker to look out, for some sinister intention. There are three or four wicked men who will never rest satisfied till they have either driven us out of the parish or murdered us, and the Captain is the worst of the lot."

"You don't mean Captain Evans, the gentleman we met at dinner at Temple Brocton? He is very rough and uncouth, is not he, uncle?" pursued Constance, appealing to Mr. Pendrell, who had been holding aloof from the conversation which he had only partially overheard; "but I should

not fancy he could be so bad as you suppose—not to think of anything so wicked. Impossible!"

"Oh! he is the worst man in the parish," returned Mrs. Parker. "If you only knew all that he has said about my husband and the abusive language he uses against him. Only last night Mr. Parker came in from Farmer Hurcott's, where he had heard all that the Captain had been saying, and he says, 'I will swear my life against them all, for I know not what they want, unless it is my life;' and I fear that is the truth," she continued, giving vent once more to her tears.

"Come, come, my dear Mrs. Parker," said Mr. Pendrell coaxingly, "you must cheer up, you must indeed. You must not take such a gloomy view of matters. Your good husband is a very worthy man—don't suppose for a moment that I have any but the highest opinion of him; but, nevertheless, I can't help thinking that he has been a little—just a little indiscreet in this matter of the tithe. He should have yielded a little bit to their prejudices. There is still time. A little conciliation, you know, goes a long way. After all, he has made his stand, and now he may yield, you know, with a good grace."

"Yield! bless you, sir. Mr. Parker is not one to yield. It is his way—he is as firm as a rock in anything he takes up."

"More's the pity, for I am sure no good can be done here unless each party is prepared to make concessions. I'm sure of it. Well, you will come over to Hallowcliffe to-morrow; won't you, Mrs. Parker?"

"Well, really, Miss Pendrell, I can't promise; I can't indeed. I don't like to leave my husband; and we neither of us care to stay out late."

"It would be so nice if you would come. I have so much to talk to you about, and I will lend you some nice books lately sent me, which I am sure you will like, and in which you will find great consolation under present circumstances."

As Constance rode homeward with her uncle, following him in single file through the narrow lanes overhung with eglantine and honeysuckle, she reflected upon the sad countenance and depressed tone of poor Mrs. Parker. She felt an especial interest in her, for though sensible of her social inferiority, she believed her to be among the very few of her

neighbours who in any way sympathised in her peculiar religious views, which were those of the evangelical party which had recently taken root at Cambridge and numbered among its more enlightened members William Wilberforce, the famous philanthropist. This party had endeavoured to import into the Establishment some of that fervour and zeal which, however misguided, marked the Wesleyan movement of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, Constance felt dissatisfied with Mrs. Parker's creed, and often secretly longed for a renewal of the pleasant and profitable conversations she had had with Mademoiselle de S. Pol during her convalescence at Hallowcliffe. Madeleine knew nothing of controversy and was unskilled in argument, but, like every pious Catholic, naturally desired that all wanderers might be drawn into the One Fold. She had consequently prayed ardently for the conversion of her friend, whose doubts and difficulties had frequently been revealed to her. To Constance, whose knowledge of Catholics was limited to an early imbibed prejudice against Popery and Papists, it was a matter of considerable surprise to find that her friend was deeply imbued with that personal love of the Saviour after which she had been vainly groping. About the time of Madeleine's recovery there occurred one of those revulsions in the feelings of Constance which are not unusual in persons in her condition. "I hope you won't let that French girl make a Papist of you," was an observation which had fallen one day from her uncle when she had retailed some of her friend's remarks. This had sufficed to create a sort of panic in her feelings, leading her to experience a sense of relief at Madeleine's departure. Nearly three months had passed since that event, and she often felt a yearning after her friend and a longing to renew those conversations which had done more than anything she could remember towards raising her heart to the contemplation of Divine things. Such were the thoughts which passed through the girl's mind as she followed her uncle along the narrow lane by which they approached the picturesque village of Hallowcliffe.

It would be almost impossible to convey to our readers a notion of the feelings with which Constance Pendrell viewed Hallowcliffe and its associations. Its half-timbered cottages, its church overshadowed by yew-trees almost adjoining the mansion, its green lawn and stately elm-tree, its dell termi-

nating in the wood of oak and yew, its undulating meadows and sedgy pools, all combined to form an *ensemble* which seemed to her the nearest approach to an earthly paradise. She seldom returned to it after the briefest absence without mentally contrasting its beauties with the less favoured sites in its neighbourhood. A cultivated friend of Mr. Melshrub's who had come over to sketch in the village, while agreeing in the admiration of the natural beauties of the place, suggested various improvements which art might effect in the mansion and the grounds. He told her how he would convert the ugly square brick house into an Italian palazzo with a balustered terrace, and create gardens worthy of the noble mansion which he would erect. All this sounded like sacrilege in the ears of Constance, who would have considered her paradise desecrated by any such transformation.

On reaching the door they learnt that Madeleine de S. Pol had been calling in the Hartlip carriage, and that two gentlemen had ridden over on horseback. This intelligence raised a flutter in the heart of Constance, who was vexed at having missed her friend.

"Oh uncle!" she exclaimed on taking up the cards, "we have never returned the Northwell's last call, and Madeleine is staying there!"

"Umph! Well, I suppose we must ride over there some day. You seem desperately taken with these Papists."

The girl coloured up, but made no reply. On the following day she received this note by the post:

"PERSHULL HALL, ELMBRIDGE.

"DEAR CONSTANCE,—I called at Hallowcliffe yesterday on my way from Hartlip Hall to this place, so full of sad memories to me, and oh! so lonely after all the society I have been enjoying. Dear, good Mrs. Wakeman tries to make it as pleasant and cheerful as she can, and I believe it is my fault if I am just a little in the 'blues,' as you English say. I was so disappointed at not finding you at home, although, as I was escorted to Hallowcliffe by two cavaliers, it might have been difficult to get much conversation with you, my dear friend. I had been looking forward to a walk down your lovely dell and having a long chat with you in the wood. It is true that that wood of yours is not

without certain souvenirs of a very mixed character, of which I will talk to you when we meet. You are so fond of long rides that I positively insist upon your inducing your uncle to escort you to Pershull Hall. It is a quaint old place, which would delight your antiquarian visitor, of whom you were telling me. Please come and see me, and relieve the solitude of your truly attached friend,

"Tuesday, June 17, 1806." MADELEINE DE S. POL."

After reading the note, Constance handed it to her uncle, who, to her surprise, at once assented to its proposal; evidently preferring a ride to Pershull Hall to a formal visit to Lord and Lady Northwell at Hartlip.

As the weather was hot and the days long they dined early, and started on their long ride late in the afternoon, so as to enjoy the cool of the evening.

Just as they were preparing to start, the servant came to announce the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Parker, accompanied by their child, who had come over to call. This was a most unwelcome and inopportune visit, but Constance at once felt the necessity of resigning herself to her fate and showing them all the hospitality in her power. Both husband and wife appeared depressed and anxious, but more especially the latter. Mr. Pendrell remanded their horses, and pressed their guests to remain for tea.

The old elm-tree on the bowling-green was the customary reception place at Hallowcliffe in the hot summer weather, and thither Constance and her aunt conducted Mrs. Parker and her child, while the Rector was in conversation with Mr. Pendrell.

"I shall have to come to you, sir, in your magisterial capacity before long, I expect, and get you to bind over some of my unruly flock to keep the peace."

"Ah! I am sorry to hear it, Mr. Parker, very sorry. I had hoped after that sad business of yours with Barnett, as much as four or five years since, that you would have made it up with them. A little conciliation, Mr. Parker, would have done you no harm. You won your action, you know, and got damages against Barnett. After that it would have been so easy to have adopted the conciliatory line and given in about the tithe when they agreed to come into your original terms, you know."

"Confound the fellows! they would not adopt any terms. They refused to compensate me for my tithe barn."

"Come, come, Mr. Parker, you should be satisfied when your boy takes his whipping in good part without making him pay for the birch-rod. It is too much to expect of them; it is, indeed."

"Umph! You don't know them, sir. They are an uncompromising set of villains, and are led on by that rascally Captain, who if he had had his deserts would have been swung up long ago."

"I am afraid you don't go the right way to work with them, Mr. Parker."

"Would you have me eat humble pie, sir, and resign my position as Rector of the parish? That is not in my line, anyhow."

Meanwhile Mary Parker and her daughter were seated beneath the shadow of the elm-tree conversing with Mrs. and Miss Pendrell.

"I am so glad to get poor Mr. Parker here to-day, for really we are living in a state of siege in our house; we are indeed," said the Rector's wife. "I don't know how it is, but I suppose you will think me a terrible coward. I've a sort of presentiment of something terrible going to happen to us. They are a wicked set, these Oddingley farmers, and I'm sure they'd murder us if they could. There is a fellow named Hemming prowling about under our orchard. He has even been seen with a gun, and I think I told you, Miss Pendrell, how we heard the stones against our window at night. Well, do you know, this has happened again, only the night before last, when my husband would have thrown up the window and put out his head, but for my preventing him."

"I wish you could both leave Oddingley for a time,"

"Mr. Parker won't hear of it. He says he'll brave it out, come what may."

"Are you not afraid of walking home in the dark?" inquired Constance.

"We shall get some one from your village to walk with us," said Mrs. Parker. "If it were not for little Mary here I shouldn't so much mind, but, to say the truth, I am rather timid in our dark lanes; I am indeed."

"Who will walk with you? There is Rogers in Manor Cottages; we will take you as far as his house, if you like."

It was late when Constance returned from escorting the Oddingley parson and his wife down the village. On her way homeward she met a good-looking young woman, who accosted her.

"I begs pardon, miss, but am I speaking to Miss Pendrell?"

"Yes; what can I do for you?"

"I does not quite know, miss, but I believe as you be acquainted with the foreigneering lady as was used to be at Evelench. If I may make so bold I would ask you, miss, if as you knows where I might find her. She druv through Wych only yesterday, and they tells me as she'd been calling up at Hallowcliffe."

"Yes, quite true. You mean Mademoiselle de S. Pol. But tell me, what do you want with her?"

"Ah, miss, she was a kind lady, and I wants some kind lady to befriend me. She knows all about us too, but I begs pardon, miss, in making so free. I only wants to know, if so be as you could tell me where she bides."

"Mademoiselle de S. Pol is staying at Pershull Hall, I believe; but I don't know that you could do any good by going to see her. She is on a visit to some friends, and may possibly be leaving shortly. Besides, she might not like persons calling on her in a friend's house; possibly not."

"And most like, miss, it's a long way from Wych?"

"I believe it is," returned Miss Pendrell, not without a ray of comfort in the thought, since she dreaded the notion that, by her incautious disclosures, she might unwittingly be inflicting an unwelcome visitor upon her friend.

"Pershull—Pershull. I have heard tell of the name; somewhere Elmbridge or Chaddesley way, most like," rejoined the woman.

"At least four miles from Wych," replied Constance.

"If that be all I'd walk it easy," said the poor creature. "Ah, miss, I'd walk farther still to find that good lady; that I would."

"You know her well?"

"She spoke so kindly when I see'd her, and they say as how she be like to marry the poor gentleman as I helped to nurse in a fever at the Captain's down by Oddingley."

"Did you nurse Mr. Wyvil?"

"Yes, indeed, miss."

"What is your name?"

"Elizabeth Hemming."

"Hemming," rejoined Constance, endeavouring to remember where she had last heard the name, when it suddenly flashed across her that Mrs. Parker had mentioned it. "Where do you live?"

"At Wych."

"Are you married?"

"Yes, miss, I be."

"What is your husband?"

"A wheelwright and carpenter, miss."

"What has he to do with Oddingley?" asked Constance, anxious to satisfy her curiosity as to whether he could possibly be the individual to whom Mrs. Parker had alluded."

"Oh, he works for the Captain and a lot of Oddingley folks at odd jobs. Sometimes, miss, I fears he be after no good; I does, indeed."

As she said this she burst into tears.

"What do you mean, my poor woman?" inquired Constance in a tone of sympathy. "What do you mean? Is your husband the man that causes such terror to Mr. and Mrs. Parker by prowling round their premises with a gun?"

"A gun! No, miss, he have no gun—not now. He had one some time ago, but he've sold it. I knows he have no gun."

"I hope not," replied Constance, who perceived that during their conversation she had reached the green gate leading on to the lawn at Hallowcliffe.

"Good-night, miss!" exclaimed the woman somewhat abruptly.

"Are you going to Wych? Well, I hope you will try and induce your husband to give up going to Oddingley. Good-night."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LONG DAYS OF 1806.

MADELEINE was seated in the arbour at the southern extremity of the terrace at Parsloe Hall reading the "Soirées de St. Petersbourg," lent her by a French abbé staying at Grafton. Her hostess, Mrs. Wakeman, had her fixed avocations, and rarely intruded upon her guests before the dinner hour at two o'clock. Poor Fido had died at an advanced age during the previous year, and had quite lately been replaced by a spaniel, presented to her by her friend Mrs. Mowbray. After taking her favourite for a bath in the ponds, she had sought refuge from the June sun in the arbour on the terrace. The beautiful work of Joseph de Maistre evoked many a response from her own heart, and led her to long for the diffusion of the true faith among those with whom her lot seemed to be [illegible]. Certain passages alluding to the French Revolution recalled her past life, and for an instant she seemed vividly [illegible] the time when, seated in that very arbour, she had [illegible] by fear of the Abbé Apedaile to her father's [illegible] he looked across her as distinctly as if it were a [illegible] and worldly she was still under the influence [illegible] Nero barked and rose, and then com- [illegible] in approval of sounds which greeted [illegible] approaching footsteps and the dog's warning [illegible] recollections of the past, and appeared [illegible] seven or eight years before. [illegible] recollections of the past, and [illegible] almost have believed

that M. Apedaile was again come to summon her to her father's deathbed.

"Good Nestor," cried a well-known voice, "where is your mistress?"

Was there, perchance, a slight feeling of annoyance at this intrusion upon the day-dream of her past sorrows? At all events Nestor did not sympathise with her preference for solitude, if such was her inclination, for he responded affectionately to the caresses of the new-comer, jumping up and licking his hands.

"Ah! Mr. Wyvil," she exclaimed. "Have you come over with the Mowbrays from Hartlip?"

"No. I have ventured to come alone."

"What a long ride!"

"Not too long, if my visit were a welcome one. I would have ridden to the world's end upon such an errand."

"I do not understand. Have you brought me some message from Lady Northwell or Mrs. Mowbray?"

"I did not tell them I was coming."

"No?"

"Why should I? If my errand prove a failure, 'twere best they knew it not; and if successful, oh! then, like all the actions of my future life, it should be first known to her to whom that life shall henceforth be consecrated."

"I am afraid you will think me dull of comprehension, but I was always slow at guessing riddles."

"Mademoiselle de S. Pol," he returned in a supplicating tone, "you have known me many years. I was young when I ventured, in the foolish ardour of my first passion, to declare my love. Since then I have striven to render myself worthy of your hand. M. Apedaile led me to hope that some day I might win that treasure to which it was then a presumption on my part to aspire."

Madeleine was at a loss how to reply to his addresses, for she had once resolved that one, whose faith seemed to sit so lightly upon him as his then did, could be no fitting spouse for her. Since that time she had noted a gradual improvement in him, and was not insensible to the fact that she herself had been mainly instrumental in promoting it. Nevertheless, she had never realised to herself that this amelioration which she had caused in him appealed to her for a reversal of her former determination. All of a sudden

she found herself involved in a dilemma for which her own conduct had prepared the way.

"Oh, Mr. Wyvil, I was not prepared for this."

"And yet, Mademoiselle, it is to you I owe the change that has come over me. You have, indeed, been a bright light to guide my footsteps. I have laboured to follow your example even at a humble distance and most imperfectly. I ask nothing better than to be your servant—yours—to belong to you. In short, I cannot refrain any longer from proclaiming to you the truth, that I love you; yes! love you with a love which knows no bounds, which will never cease. Surely you will not extinguish all the good you have done me, by forbidding me to love you?"

"Mr. Wyvil, I can give you a sister's love. I have sometimes hoped that God would call me into religion; but even then I could love you with a sister's love and pray for you."

"Madeleine! God has called you to be a bright light in the world and guide such wanderers as myself to Heaven. Should you refuse me, I could not answer for myself. The hope of your relenting has been my stay; were that hope extinguished, despair would prove my ruin. Oh! Madeleine, I am perhaps not worthy of your pity; if—if you could let me hope on still"——

Just in the very midst of his declaration, at this most inopportune moment Madeleine heard her name repeated in a voice not unfamiliar to her ears.

"There is some one coming," she exclaimed; "it is Miss Pendrell, I am sure."

"I may hope still?" cried Wyvil, seizing her small white hand.

"Yes—yes, but please do not say any more," she said, withdrawing her hand and stepping out from the arbour to meet Constance.

Frank Wyvil, although secretly elated by what he felt to be a prelude to his perfect success, was too much a man of the world not to conceal his feelings and put on the air of an indifferent visitor. After a short conversation with the two ladies he took his departure by a pathway leading to the stables. As he was preparing to mount his horse, a young woman, who had been standing by a gate leading to the back door of the house, approached him and curtsied as she drew near.

"Ha! is that you, Betsy Hemming? My good creature, who'd have thought to meet you here?"

"Glad to see you looking so hearty, sir."

"Thanks to you, Betsy; but what's the matter? *You* don't look well or hearty, anyhow. I'm afraid that fellow ill-treats you—does he?"

"Ah, sir, I don't know what we shall come to. There's mischief brewing for us—that there is. They are bribing him to it. He ha'n't been so bad to me like o' late, but it is them farmers and the Captain as bribes him to it. If I could get him taken away from Oddingley, that's what I should like."

"They are bribing him to shoot some one they call Bony."

"Have you heard *that*, sir?"

"I heard them say that Dick was the man for a dirty job, and that he must shoot Bony. Who is Bony?"

"Bonaparte, I suppose," returned Betsy Hemming, terrified at his revelations, and instinctively afraid to divulge more than was necessary. "I wish some one would send and give him a job out this way. I have come to see if the good lady would give him a job here, to get him away from Oddingley."

"I am going through Wych. Supposing I call and engage him on a job."

"You'll not find him at home to-day; but if, sir, as you could call on Saturday, you'd find him for certain."

Frank departed, resolving to do his best to fulfil the behests of the poor woman, who likewise, thanks to the intercession of Mademoiselle de S. Pol, prevailed upon Mrs. Wakeman to promise him a job at Pershull.

Elizabeth returned homewards in better spirits, thinking that if she could but prevail upon Dick to go and work at Pershull he would be removed from all the evil influences which surrounded him at Oddingley.

On the Saturday, Dick was absent all day, and only returned late at night, so that Frank Wyvil missed seeing him, but determined to return on the Monday or Tuesday. Unfortunately he delayed his visit until the last-mentioned day.

Elizabeth was struck by the restlessness of his manner

each evening when he returned. She broached the subject of the job at Pershull.

"Ha, that'll just fit in. I'll go there when I've done with the Captain. I've a job to do for him."

"Never mind the Captain, Dick. You'd best leave him and all them folk alone. It bain't no good doing their jobs. Hast been drinking with Clewes to-day?"

Dick laughed, and said he should like a sup. Presently a knock was heard at the door, and Clewes himself appeared.

If there was one individual more repulsive to Betsy than another it was Tom Clewes, whose influence over her husband was of the most baneful description.

"Come, Dick, and have a glass," he said.

"You are not going, Dick?" cried the wife imploringly.

"Yes, but he is, missus," returned Clewes, familiarly chucking her under the chin; "ain't us, Dick? Come along. He knows which side his bread his butter lies. He'll bring thee back a pot o' money one of these days, my pretty wench, when Bony's in his grave."

Heedless to his wife's appeal, Hemming followed Clewes from the house, adjourning as usual to the Chequers, where they drank till late.

On the afternoon of Monday, the 23d of June, he returned home rather earlier than usual, and appeared in unusually good spirits.

Dick gave his wife some money to buy him some better fare than usual for his supper, and after a good meal he retired to rest before it was dark, and slept soundly.

He awoke betimes on Midsummer Day, but the sun was already above the horizon as he got out of bed declaring that it was late.

"It is about half-past five," returned his wife.

The man said little, but dressed himself hastily, only inquiring where she had put his dark-blue coat.

"What d'ye want it for, Dick?" she asked.

"I've a dirty job to do for the Captain at Oddingley Church Farm," he replied.

She was rather staggered at the tone of his reply.

"What dirty job, Dick?" she asked imploringly.

"I've got to pull some poles out of a pool," he returned.

"If that be all, I don't see why thou need'st trouble there's a better job for thee, Dick, at Pershull Hall."

"Hold thy peace, wench! 'Twill be time enough to think of Pershull Hall when I've done the Captain's dirty job down yonder."

Shortly afterwards he left the cottage, and Betsy never again saw her husband alive.

When Frank Wyvil called she thanked him, promising to inform her husband of his proffered employment—feeling in her heart a strange presentiment that the offer had arrived too late.

Towards dusk a neighbour came and told her that strange rumours were afloat, and later constables appeared to search the house. But let us not anticipate the sequel.

CHAPTER XIX.

A LOVE SCENE.

FRANK WYVIL had found a sympathising confidante in Mrs. Mowbray, who had long been hoping that he would succeed in winning the affections of her charming French friend. As soon as she heard from Frank's own lips of his partial success, she determined to complete his triumph by persuading Madeleine to come at once to Boughfield. She wrote without any direct allusion to Mr. Wyvil's presence, urging as a plea for Mademoiselle de S. Pol's coming that she was leaving the county to pay visits which might necessitate a prolonged absence. Her letter reached Pershull by the same post with one from Constance Pendrell, entreating Madeleine to spend a few days at Hallowcliffe, in order, as she observed, to renew their profitable conversations on topics of the highest interest. Mademoiselle de S. Pol showed both letters to her kind hostess, who (grieved as she was to part with her companion) made no difficulty about her accepting engagements likely to be more congenial to a girl of her age than the solitude of the old Hall. On Mrs. Wakeman's recommendation she determined to spend a couple of nights at Hallowcliffe on her way to Boughfield; so she arrived at the former house on Monday the 23d of June.

The weather was lovely, and the wood at Hallowcliffe in its perfection of beauty. The fresh green of the oaks, overshadowing banks carpeted with bluebells and other wild flowers, recalled to Madeleine visions of her childhood amid the woods around the Château de S. Pol. She had sauntered

thither with Constance on the sultry evening of the 23d to listen to a nightingale which had not yet forsaken that delicious retreat. Mr. Pendrell had gone out to an early dinner with a bachelor parson in the neighbourhood, and thus the two girls found themselves alone. Seated upon a rustic bench in a mossy nook overlooking the sheet of water in which Madeleine had suffered her mishap a few months before, they varied their enjoyment of the ornithological concert above their heads by interesting snatches of conversation.

"I sometimes wish I had been born in your faith, Madeleine, although I have been taught to believe it very wrong."

"Prejudices of education are very hard to overcome, impossible without—without immense grace," returned her friend.

"Then, if that is the case, it is very hard that your Church should condemn heretics, as I believe she does."

"How do you mean? She condemns heresy, but of the thousands and millions who are in heresy very few are wilful heretics. The Church never condemns people for anything for which they are not accountable. For aught I know you may be a Catholic without being aware of it. If you were properly baptized you were certainly once a Catholic, and if you have never committed any sin to forfeit your baptismal grace you may still be a Catholic; but it would be wrong if ever you clearly saw the truth not to follow it. As long as you are ignorant that you are in an heretical communion you may still be in the soul of the Church; but as soon as you knowingly acquiesce in your position you become a heretic, I suppose."

"I think you are too exclusive, Madeleine. There are so many good Protestants—some very, very good."

"Yes, and many very bad Catholics, I grieve to say," added her friend, "but that makes no difference. Many of your good Protestants are also in good faith, and are really in the soul of the Church without knowing they are Catholics. They are Catholics in spite of themselves."

"I do not quite understand you," rejoined Constance, "but I daresay that at heart we mean the same thing. There is so much which must be comforting and helpful in your religion, that one cannot help deploring the impassable barriers which separate us."

"All things are possible with God, so let us pray Him to unite us in one faith," replied her friend.

They continued their conversation, heedless of the hour, but their discourse was frequently interrupted by listening to the songsters of the night in the branches overhead. A secluded lane skirted the side of the wood where they were seated, and during one of their intervals of silence, they overheard voices which caused them to draw their breaths and listen more attentively.

"I'll tell ye what it is, Captain, the sooner 'tis done the better, for he be blabbing here and there."

"Bad luck to thee, Tom. I know who blabs: 'tis thyself, man, when in thy cups."

"I can be as silent as the tomb, Captain—that I can."

"Thoud'st best, or may'st swing for it."

"The job were best over—'tis no good drawling on and the fellow seen prowling like a cur round the premises. I almost wonder Bony hadn't set the constable on his steps or had him summoned before the justices; that I do."

This mysterious conversation, although not within the comprehension of the two young ladies who overheard it, was nevertheless enough to startle and perplex them.

"Let us go home," said Constance, as soon as the two men had passed.

"I know the voice of one of them," returned Madeleine. "'Tis Captain Evans, the man who recovered my jewels from the thieves."

"I wonder what they could be talking about, for what they were saying about a man prowling round the premises reminded me of what poor Mrs. Parker of Oddingley was telling me, of some one who is constantly walking round their garden with a gun in his hand, and I know that Captain Evans is their greatest enemy. It is very strange."

The young ladies had risen when Constance exclaimed: "Who is that in the wood?"

There was something alarming in her tone which caused Madeleine to turn round with a start.

"Pardon me, ladies," exclaimed Frank Wyvil, "for intruding abruptly upon your solitude. I have been looking for you for the last half-hour at least, being the bearer of a letter from Mrs. Mowbray to Mademoiselle de S. Pol."

"Oh, Mr. Wyvil, how late for you to ride over from Boughfield," returned Miss Pendrell.

"Yes, very late," added Madeleine.

"You cannot read the letter here, can you, Madeleine?" asked Constance.

"Oh, I daresay I can, my eyes are pretty good," returned her friend, who was busily deciphering the epistle.

"It will require an answer, I suppose," said Constance to Wyvil, "so perhaps we had better return towards the house?"

"A verbal answer will do, for I should be sorry to take you from the charming retreat among the nightingales."

The note was evidently contrived for the express purpose of assisting Frank in his suit, and for affording him an excuse for thus forestalling Madeleine's visit to Boughfield by a previous interview.

"My dearest Madeleine,—You cannot think how anxiously we are awaiting your arrival at Boughfield, and how much we deplore your cruel decision to postpone our happiness. You really might make some excuse to come to us to-morrow, instead of Wednesday. I am engaged on Wednesday, and want particularly to see you to-morrow, I really do. You can talk this over with the bearer of this note, to whom I have entrusted the charge of explaining matters and making all sorts of excuses and apologies for you to your good hosts, to whom remember me very kindly, and believe me your most sincere and affectionate friend,

"C. M."

"I hope that you will entrust me with a favourable answer to Mrs. Mowbray," said Frank, as soon as Madeleine had read the note.

"Impossible, I'm afraid," she returned.

"The fact is, Miss Pendrell," replied Wyvil, "that Mrs. Mowbray is very anxious to see Mademoiselle de S. Pol to-morrow about some matters of importance, having an engagement on Wednesday which will interfere with this."

"Oh, but we cannot let her leave us to-morrow. We have some friends coming expressly to meet her—besides, it is such a very short visit."

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Wyvil, that you should have had your long ride in vain," added Madeleine, "but"——

"Not in vain—for I have seen you."

"You must thank Mrs. Mowbray for her letter," she pursued, without apparently heeding his interruption.

"And on Wednesday?" inquired Frank.

"But if Mrs. Mowbray is engaged on Wednesday, Madeleine," observed Constance, "why not remain here till Thursday?"

"Shall I?" said Madeleine, turning naïvely to Frank with a look which seemed to penetrate his soul.

"Shall you? Miss Pendrell says she has friends to meet you to-morrow, and I know that Mrs. Mowbray has especially invited one to meet you on Wednesday. You will surely not disappoint that friend?"

"Hem! Well—I have promised Mrs. Mowbray to go on Wednesday; so, Constance, you must allow me to keep to my engagements."

"Then I am to tell Mrs. Mowbray that I have failed in my negotiation, and that you will not relent?"

"I think I shall write her a note," said Madeleine as they approached the house, towards which they had been unconsciously bending their steps.

The library window was open, but the room was empty.

Constance looked at the clock, and, making an excuse, departed to see if supper was on the table and her father returned.

"Mademoiselle de S. Pol, you must excuse my having come so late."

"Why did you come?" she returned.

"You can guess why."

"No."

"Because I hate being absent from you."

"You have lived a long time without feeling that deprivation."

"I am not so sure that I have ever lived happily away from you since first I met you. I should have been happier all these years if M. Apedaile had thought fit to"——

"My guardian could not quite dispose of my heart."

"But now, tell me, Mademoiselle de S. Pol—Madeleine if I may dare so to call you."

"Well, Madeleine, if you like."

"Yes, Madeleine!" he said, taking her hand and raising it to his lips. "My Madeleine."

"Yours, Mr. Wyvil! You jump very rapidly at conclusions."

"If I call you Madeleine, you may surely call me Frank."

"I don't much like Frank. I should prefer calling you Francis or François, which you know was originally derived from the name of my countrymen."

"And is consequently, I hope, not altogether displeasing to you; but call me by any name you prefer—whatever name you select shall be mine. Oh, Madeleine, my adored one."

If we draw a veil over the tender scene which followed, we are not so certain that it entirely escaped the observation of Constance when she re-entered the room, expecting to find Madeleine writing her note to Mrs. Mowbray, and not a little surprised at discovering the lovers standing at the open window gazing at the stars.

"I am afraid I must go," said Frank. "May I order my horse, Miss Pendrell?"

"You will stay for supper, Mr. Wyvil. My father has not returned, but he will soon be back."

"They will be waiting up for me."

Nevertheless he remained for supper, and the time sped by in such pleasant converse that they forgot to look at the clock until Mr. Pendrell returned within half an hour of midnight; and then, in the dusk of that starlight night, the accepted lover rode triumphantly back by Oddingley and Tibberton to Boughfield, which he reached not before one o'clock on the 24th of June.

CHAPTER XX.

A MURDER.

BETIMES on that same morning Richard Hemming left his house in Wych, dressed in his blue coat with flat brass buttons, and made his way by Hallowcliffe and Shirnall to the Trench Woods. We have already described his short thick-set figure and ungainly appearance. He was at this time about thirty-four years of age, and had contracted a stolid air of indifference, which might induce others to regard him as a fitting tool for the commission of a crime. He was met in the Trench Woods by Thomas Clewes, with whom he had a lengthened conversation. Later in the day he stole down towards the Church Farm, and might have been seen in the field adjoining Captain Evans' rick-yard dragging some poles out of the pond. He did not remain very long at this task, but disappeared into the house, whence, towards four o'clock, he sallied cautiously out by a side door, carrying a gun.

. . . . . .

"Where are you going, George?" said Mrs. Parker, perceiving that her husband was bent upon walking out.

"I'm going to drive in our cows to be milked," said her spouse in an indifferent tone, chucking up a shilling which he was holding in his hand, and catching it as it fell.

"Oh, George, I wish you wouldn't go out alone. I hate your going alone; I do, indeed."

"What, in broad daylight, Mary? You forget this is Midsummer Day. By rights it ought to be a Church festival, but one might as well think of converting your poultry as

hope to instil any notion of fasts and festivals into the Oddingley heathen. I'm going to drive in our cows, so you need not be alarmed if I am not back for half an hour."

The glebe fields whither Mr. Parker repaired were at some distance from the Rectory house. They consisted of long narrow strips of pasture lying between two parish roads, the one forming the boundary between Oddingley and Salwarpe, and the other leading from Droitwich to the village. A public footway skirted the glebe hedge, being the shortest cut from Salwarpe to Oddingley. In these meadows the Rector pastured his cows, and such was the rustic simplicity of the worthy man that he not unfrequently drove them homeward on a summer's evening for his cook to milk.

George Parker was born beneath the shadow of Greystoke Castle in Cumberland, at that time the residence of the Duke of Norfolk, who had always befriended him. For many years he had been classical usher at S. John's Academy, on the Kenilworth side of Warwick, subsequently to which he had been ordained to the curacy of Dorking in Surrey. All this was previously to his marriage. His experience had thus been tolerably varied, and had made him acquainted with dissimilar parts of England. He often loved to reflect upon scenes of his former life, and to contrast with secret loathing his present seclusion at Oddingley with the wilds of Cumberland, the genial neighbourhood of Warwick, or the charms of his first cure in Surrey. On the present occasion his memory carried him back to a sunny day, when he was traversing a picturesque Surrey common and came upon an encampment of gipsies, one of whom insisted upon telling his fortune. She told him of his future benefice and his future wife, when an old crone, peering over the shoulder of her comelier comrade, who was examining the outstretched palm, observed in a sour and surly tone, "Mark'st the line of life must needs close two days ere forty-four?" He had scarcely given the foolish prognostication a thought from that time to this, and yet now the recollection suddenly flashed vividly upon his memory. "'Two days ere forty-four;' why, my birthday," thought he, "is on the 26th of June, the day after to-morrow, and I shall then be forty-four." A sudden thrill of terror seemed to strike him, and he almost determined to return home without the cows, but he soon reasoned

himself out of his folly, and pursued his way along the path. He was startled by footsteps on the further side of the hedge, which seemed to advance in unison with his. He paused to listen, and the rustling ceased. He concluded that he must have been deceived, and that the sounds were but the reflection of his own foolish fears.

Just then he fell in with Susan Surman (John Barnett's dairymaid) driving her master's cows to be milked. She curtsied to him, and said, "Good evening, sir."

"Good evening, Susan. I am glad to see you. I'm on the same errand. You are all alone, ain't you, Susan?"

"Yes, sir."

His own cows were in the next field. He had scarcely left the girl when he once more heard a rustling sound in the hedge, and, just as he came to the gate of his own meadow and was unlocking it, he saw a flash and felt a sudden shock through his system, followed by a loud report.

"O Lord! O Lord!" he cried, and fell upon the ground.

The sound of the gun was heard by two Worcester butchers proceeding along the lane towards Droitwich. On first hearing it, one of them, named Lench, exclaimed, "Some one must have killed a hare."

Immediately afterwards they heard the exclamation proceeding from the neighbouring field, and both of them ran to a gate leading into the meadow. While Lench approached the wounded man, his comrade Giles, who was more active, went in pursuit of the perpetrator of the deed, and looking over a gap into the next field, saw a man hiding something in the hedge.

"What have you been doing?" he cried.

"Nothing," replied Hemming, for it was he, and turning round he ran away.

Giles pursued him for a few hundred yards, but he was soon outdistanced, and the man returned.

Susan Surman had scarcely left Mr. Parker when she was stunned by the report of the gun; but she ran away in terror, not halting until she came up to her master's waggoner in the lane, when both heard a cry of Murder! Shortly afterwards Lench the butcher came up to them, and told them what he had seen. The three proceeded together to where Mr. Parker was lying, and, raising him up, perceived that he still breathed, although in a state of unconsciousness.

Meanwhile Giles ran on towards Hallowcliffe, and meeting Mr. Pendrell, told him what had occurred. He spurred his horse, and, hastening to the spot, found a considerable concourse already assembled round the dying man, some chafing his hands, and others bathing his temples with water from a neighbouring ditch. A few minutes after the worthy magistrate's arrival George Parker drew his last sigh. The Justice bade some of those present fetch a chair to carry the victim homewards to the Rectory, while he rode to Farmer Barnett's to make inquiries.

As to Susan Surman, she was actually but a few yards from the Parson (with whom she had been conversing) when the gun was fired, but instead of turning back to assist him, she ran after the cows, which were startled by the report. The girl subsequently stated that each morning and evening for some time before, as she went for the cows, she had been wont to meet Richard Hemming in her master's field, where he appeared to be walking backwards and forwards as if waiting for some one, until he had worn a path in the mowing grass. She had often spoken to him, but he would neither tell her his name nor where he lived. She had mentioned the fact to her master and mistress, who only laughed at her, telling her that the man was evidently her sweetheart. All these circumstances, and many more, were recorded by Susan Surman many years afterwards, when she also stated that on the morning of the 24th of June she had seen Tom Clewes, the farmer, passing Mr. Barnett's stable, and had heard him say that he should be glad to hear of a dead parson in the parish when he came home from Bromsgrove Fair that day.

Mr. Pendrell called at Barnett's farm, and, after some difficulty, brought him out. He was not without a suspicion that Barnett knew something of the terrible crime which had just been perpetrated upon his land, because it was evident that the shot was fired from Barnett's meadow. Old Mrs. Barnett, the tenant's mother, had told the magistrate that her son was at the Captain's, but Susan Surman had seen him put his head out of the parlour window, and informed the Justice of the fact. Dismounting from his horse, the worthy Squire entered the house and led the farmer out, just as George Parker's corpse was being carried

past upon a chair borne by four men. The pale face was exposed to view, and presented a ghastly spectacle.

"Tell me, Barnett, whether you do not know something of that job?" he asked, pointing to the murdered man.

"No, sir, that I don't, and I am very sorry it have happened," returned the other, wincing under his words.

"Well, it must be sifted," replied the Justice drily, as he turned away to follow the body to the Rectory House, where a painful scene awaited him, when he sought to instil some words of comfort into the ears of the poor disconsolate widow, utterly stunned by a blow which had, nevertheless, been so long impending over her.

After collecting what information he was able to scrape together, Mr. Pendrell hastened back towards Droitwich, and summoning some of his brother magistrates, consulted them upon the best course to adopt. Constables and others were sent off in various directions in search of Hemming, who was supposed to be the murderer. His house in Droitwich was searched, and men on horseback and on foot started off in pursuit to the extremities of the shire. The Coroner was likewise apprised of the event, and issued his summonses for an inquest on the following day.

The Melshrubs were dining at Hallowcliffe, and Constance and Madeleine were sitting with their friends in the wood when one of the garden-men brought them tidings of the fatal deed. A thrill of terror ran through the hearts of the girls as they recalled the dialogue which they had heard from the same seat on the previous evening, and which, as they now reflected upon it, seemed to tally strangely with the catastrophe which had just been announced to them.

"Poor Mrs. Parker! She foresaw some such terrible calamity. It's not above a week since they were with us on the lawn."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MURDERER'S SOLITUDE.

AS soon as Richard Hemming had eluded his pursuer, he made a circuit in a southerly direction. It was important that he should remain in the neighbourhood until he could obtain the stipulated guerdon for his crime, and yet if he did so it would be next to impossible to escape recognition and capture. It is true that he had been cautioned to go off at once to Bristol and embark for America, with a promise that he should receive the money on reaching the seaport. Being of a suspicious temperament, and very ignorant, the man distrusted his employers, and would have preferred making sure of his prize before starting. On reaching the summit of the hill known as the Hulls, he halted to recover his breath and reconnoitre the country, taking care to conceal himself behind some thick brambles. Resting on that mound, he discovered that two men were in pursuit of him. He heard them mention his name, and saw them make for a deep marl pit on the bank thickly grown with hawthorn and gorse. While they were searching the bushes, he again took to his heels across some open common, towards meadows lying to the south-east. The men, becoming aware of his evasion, followed him in hot pursuit. He knew the country sufficiently well to dodge them cleverly, and conceal himself among the tall, widespread hedges of the district. It is recorded that nearly an hour after the murder he was seen by a publican at Tibberton coming through a thick hedge from one field into another, although there was a gate close

by. He appeared confused, pale, and much fatigued. He was wearing the long blue greatcoat and round hat in which he had left his home at break of day. He knew the publican, and accosted him.

"I say, Tom Colwell, don't you say nothing about me if they asks you—there be two men arter me, Tom—don't you say nought about me, or how I looked—don't, Tom—I be going to Himbleton—good-night!"

The wretched man walked on at a brisk pace, but no sooner had he lost sight of the publican than he turned sharply to the left and struck across some rugged fields, until he came into a footpath leading from Tibberton to Warndon. He then ran as long as he was able, and, passing the picturesque little half-timbered church and ancient manor-house of Warndon, he pursued the path as it gradually ascended a range of hills bounding the city of Worcester to the north-east. Those hills were profusely crested with gorse and broom, and commanded a lovely prospect in almost every direction. The sun was still high above the horizon, and the fair vale of the Severn, bounded by the Malvern Hills, with the city and its minster in the foreground, presented a vision sadly out of harmony with the gloom in the murderer's mind. From the summit of the hill he cowered back, and saw Hartlip Towers rising to his left, Warndon in the valley beneath him, beyond it the woods of Tibberton forming a long low line, and over them the woods of Oddingley and the tall twin elm-trees which overhung the village. A sudden mental vision shot across his fancy as he pictured the pale face of the murdered man, and, wiping the perspiration from his brow, he pushed forward, descending the hill to the hostelry called the Virgin Tavern. This ancient inn may possibly have retained an appellation given it in happier times, when the Immaculate Queen of Heaven was honoured in this land. The landlord, Mr. Richard Page, was standing at the door, when a man came up in a great hurry and asked for a pint of ale. The man had a blue coat hanging on his arm, and completely answered the description of Richard Hemming. He sat down uneasily at a table in front of the door, and showed much impatience until the liquor was set before him. Drinking it off hastily, he paid his money and departed in the direction of Worcester. However, he had not gone far

ere he struck into another path, which took him towards Whittington, on the London road. His object in going thither may have been to have secured his place in the mail to the metropolis. It is possible that he found no seat available on the coach; for it has been asserted that he returned thence to the Raven Inn, on the road from Droitwich to Worcester, at a distance of about two miles from the county town, in hopes of catching the Bristol mail, but he discovered to his horror that he was too late, the coach having already passed. He called for a mug of ale or porter and drank it off, and, favoured by the darkness, turned back towards Oddingley. There was a restless indecision about all his movements, partly to be accounted for by the fact of his not having received the reward of his iniquity, and being at the same time in constant fear of pursuit and detection. Tired and footsore, he made his way to Captain Evans' house, which he reached when most of the household were asleep. Being acquainted with the Captain's room, he threw some pebbles at the window, until the latter, being a light sleeper, opened his casement. "Who's there?"

"Dick Hemming."

"The devil! I'll tell thee what it is; thou shouldst have been at Bristol before now; there is nought left but the gallows. Come, and I'll give thee some supper; but I warn thee if thou loiterest about here I'll beat thy brains out. At break of day thou'dst best hide in the Trenches in the Robbers' Cave, and come down after dusk to-morrow night to Tom Clewes', and shalt have thy pay and go straight off to Liverpool or Bristol."

The Captain admitted him into the kitchen and gave him a good supper, and sent him up into a loft to sleep.

At five o'clock on the following morning the Captain called his nephew, George Bankes.

"Here's a confounded business. This fellow Hemming is in the house, and like enough there'll be a search to-day. Get him down to Tom Clewes', if thou canst, for we must be shut of him, lad."

Young Bankes went down to Netherwood, where he found Clewes in his foldyard.

"I say, master," he said to him in a low voice, "we have got Hemming at our house, and I don't know what to do with him. Will you let him come down here?"

Clewes was not more eager than his neighbours to harbour the murderer. He who had been so friendly with the man, consorting with him daily at public-houses and conferring with him constantly upon the yet unaccomplished deed, now seemed to shrink from and loathe the perpetrator of the very act which he had instigated.

"I won't have him here," he said, "nor nothing to do with him."

"Come, Tom Clewes, he is a friend of yours. He will come and look you up himself. I believe now he is lurking in your meadows."

"I thought he was in your house, Master George?"

"The Captain's turned him out by this time, I make no doubt."

Later in the day a summons came from the Coroner, calling upon Captain Evans to attend an inquest at the Rectory on the body of the Rev. George Parker. He sat as foreman of the jury and heard the depositions of several of the witnesses, which were duly taken down and sworn in his presence. John Lench and Thomas Giles proved that they had heard the report of the gun and the cry of, "O Lord! O Lord!" that they had seen a man concealing something in the hedge, and that Giles had pursued him. Thomas Colwell of Tibberton deposed to having met Hemming on the previous evening proceeding towards Himbleton. These men swore to the blue coat, slouch hat, and general appearance of Hemming.

After Mr. Barneby, the Coroner, had read over the depositions of these and other witnesses, he called upon the jury to return a verdict upon the evidence before them. Notwithstanding the strong circumstances attaching the guilt of the crime upon Richard Hemming, whose person was clearly described by John Lench, Thomas Giles, and Thomas Colwell, the jury were persuaded by their foreman to return a verdict of "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown."

The good farmers of Oddingley had taken care to prevent any of their own servants, such as Susan Surman, the carter Tustin, Henry Halbert, and a score more (whose narrations might have involved their masters), from appearing before the Coroner.

Meanwhile the murderer was hiding in the Trench Woods,

in that Robbers' Cave in which Frank Wyvil had found some of Madeleine's treasures. The wretched man was in a state bordering on despair. He had learnt from Evans and Bankes that the emissaries of justice were on his track, and he cursed his fate in not having caught the Bristol mail, and thus eluded their pursuit. The slightest sound among the branches, a bird or a rabbit, caused him to start. Imaginary sounds of footsteps, and the possibility of being seen by persons passing through the wood, induced him to enter the cavern already known to our readers. The darkness of the cave was even more oppressive to his nerves than the terrors of the wood. If he no longer felt himself pursued by constables, he was haunted by imaginary visions which almost scared him out of his senses. The pale face of the murdered man was continually before him, and an inward voice accusing him of his deed. At times he felt strongly prompted to yield himself up to the officers of justice, and recount the whole story of his crime. At these moments he was not devoid of a sensation of satisfaction in the thought that he should thus draw down vengeance upon the farmers of Oddingley, who seemed to be haggling over the reward of his iniquity. The hours passed slowly during his concealment in the cave. He might have lived a lifetime since the events of the previous day. At length he heard a rustling noise above his head, and trembled at the thought that the officers of justice might be on his track.

"Halloo, Dick! are ye down there, fellow?"

It was Tom Clewes' voice. He and Hemming had been on intimate terms, meeting at public-houses day after day, plotting the very deed which the latter had now accomplished. But now Hemming detected a change in his former boon companion. His manner and tone towards him were altered. There was a cold air of scorn which made him feel that even by the least sensitive of his employers he was shunned as some loathsome reptile.

"I'll tell you what it is, Dick. If you don't want to swing for it, you'd best do as I bids ye. Wait here till dusk and creep down my meadows to the farmhouse, and then sneak into the big barn and hide ye among the straw in the mow. The Captain 'll give ye your money and some'ut for your journey besides, and ye shall have your supper and be off to

America, and we shall be done with you—d'ye hear me, fellow?"

"Umph! I'll tell ye what it is, Master Clewes. If I swings, the whole lot on ye shall swing too, for I've done nought but your bidding, master, and you knows it. 'Twas the Captain's dirty job and yourn." Hemming was galled by the altered tone and supercilious manner of the young farmer, and had spoken out more strongly than he meant.

"Ah! Dick," returned Clewes, making an effort to pocket the indignity. "Wait till ye sack your money, man. I'll tell you what it is. If the Captain were to hear you speak such words as these he'd never give ye your money; 'cause, don't ye see, as long as no money 'ave passed you can't prove as he've had a hand in it. 'Tis no use peaching until you're paid. But I won't say nought about it to the Captain, you may make certain, Dick. It will all be square. You come down, as I tells you, to the barn and hide in the mow, and it 'll be all square."

"I said more nor I meant, Master Tom, so don't peach to the Captain. I was a bit fretted by being shut up in this dark hole. I'll be bound you find me in the mow all right. I suppose you'll give me some victuals and drink down yonder, for I be clammed."

"You shall have your supper, Dick; be cautious, for there are some score of folk after ye, and a prize offered for your apprehension."

Retiring into his den, the miserable wretch awaited the sunset to quit his lair. Another dreary period, in which minutes seemed like hours and hours like days, transpired, until at length, galled on by increasing hunger, he came forth from his lurking place and proceeded through the bushes in the direction of the steep bank overshadowing the farm of Netherwood.

A young woman met him in the dusk as he crossed a public pathway on the outer margin of the wood, but otherwise he was not noticed. Startled at the sight of the girl, he stepped over a gap into a field beyond and crept stealthily down by the side of a rough, quickset hedge. When he came within sight of the farmhouse at Netherwood he paused for a considerable time to make sure that none of the labourers or servants were about. He heard some one whistling, and after a time observed a man in a white smock-

frock passing along the highway towards Oddingley. The twilight was already on the wane, and everything seemed still and silent round the old farmhouse with its black and white half-timbered gable roofs and its vast wooden barn, when Richard Hemming crept along the hedgerow till he came to the gate of the foldyard. Peering into the enclosure, he was satisfied that no one was about. There was a small barn-door ajar only a few yards from the gate. He quickly stepped inside, and groping his way into the raised bay or mow at the south-western extremity of the building, he lay down and concealed himself among the straw. We will leave him to his troubled dreams during the brief sleep snatched after the anxieties through which he had passed.

Who knows what warnings those dreams contained, or what graces were offered even then to that erring soul?

CHAPTER XXII.

FRANK WYVIL'S RIDE TO HALLOWCLIFFE.

THE tidings of the murder spread rapidly about the neighbourhood, awakening suspicion and creating terror throughout the surrounding district. Mr. Pendrell was convinced that the Captain had had a hand in it, but he saw no means of bringing it home to the old reprobate unless the actual murderer could be captured and convicted.

The news reached Boughfield on the morning of the 25th. The old Squire heard of it from his gamekeeper, and announced it at the breakfast-table. Mrs. Mowbray was proposing to drive to Hallowcliffe in the family coach to bring back Madeleine, and Frank Wyvil had been arranging that he would prepare the way by riding over to apprise Mademoiselle de S. Pol of her coming. The coach could only go by the turnpike road, which passed through Worcester and by the lodge gates of Hartlip. Mrs. Mowbray intended lightening the journey to the old horses by resting at the latter mansion either in going or returning from Mr. Pendrell's. The report of a murder at Oddingley created considerable consternation.

"Mr. Parker was a friend of the Pendrells," observed Mrs. Mowbray. "I remember seeing his wife and sister with them at the Worcester Music Meeting. Do you remember, Robert, our meeting him at the Shelsleys some years ago?"

"Oh, *I've* often met him," remarked Wyvil; "besides, I'm not certain that I don't know some one who had a hand in it. They talked pretty openly about it, anyhow."

"Who do you mean?"

"Why, the Oddingley farmers generally. They all hated the Parson like poison. It looks bad, I confess. I hope my old friend the Captain will come off clear; but it is an ugly business."

"Do you mean Captain Evans, who was so kind in reclaiming the jewels for Mademoiselle de S. Pol?" inquired Father Southworth, who was present.

"Oh, he is good-nature itself; nothing could be more hospitable than he was to me. Poor old boy, I hope he has not run his neck into the noose."

"But wait a bit," exclaimed the old Squire; "the keeper told me the name of the man who is supposed to have done it."

"Told you the name, uncle?"

"Yes, he is a joiner from Droitwich; at least, there is good reason for suspecting it. I can't recall the name, but he told me, and said the fellow had been seen at the Virgin Tavern last evening."

"Was his name Hemming?" inquired Frank.

"By Jove, how d'ye know it? Yes, that was the name."

"You see I know something about it. He will be a good riddance, no doubt, but I fear he is only the tool of others. It is a bad lookout for my friend at the Church Farm."

"You will have to give evidence if you know so much, Frank," observed young Mr. Mowbray.

"I hope not; besides, mine is only hearsay evidence, worth nothing in a court of justice."

"Well, you will not venture through Oddingley now, Mr. Wyvil," observed Mrs. Mowbray; "you had better come with me."

"Delighted to go with you, but I fear this would defeat the object of my journey; and as to Oddingley, I am more anxious than ever to go that way, just to get a correct version of the story."

"You are not afraid?"

"They have only committed one murder there as yet," rejoined Frank, laughing, "and I don't suppose they'll commit another quite so soon. Besides, I don't suppose I have done anything to deserve it."

So far from avoiding the ill-fated village, Frank spurred his horse and never slackened rein until he reached the

outskirts of the little hamlet. Instead of pursuing the direct road to Hallowcliffe (where all his hopes were centred), he turned to the right and passed the Rectory House. The green shutters of that staring white mansion were closed and the blinds down, but a gig was drawn up in the yard and a saddle-horse tied to the gate. Not seeing a soul about, Frank rode on slowly toward the Captain's house by the church. He met no one on the road, but saw two men walking across a field, in one of whom he thought he recognised the Captain, but strove in vain to arrest his attention. On reaching the Court the place seemed deserted. He hallooed two or three times, when George Bankes appeared at a window.

"Halloo, Mr. Wyvil! the Captain ain't in."

"Is Miss Bankes at home?" inquired Frank.

"I don't know; most likely not."

"Yes, I am," said Kitty, looking over his shoulder through the casement; "I am, but I'm very busy, Mr. Wyvil."

"A bad business this affair of poor Mr. Parker," returned Frank after the usual salutations, anxious to relieve his mind.

"A bad business," returned Kate, in a half-savage tone, "but no affair of ours, that I can see."

"They say Dick Hemming was the murderer," rejoined Wyvil.

"They say a lot o' things, but no one knows nothing about it—a pack of tattlers. I don't care what they says. There's the inquest to be held this afternoon. The Coroner is there now, I hear."

"I am afraid from what I've heard," rejoined Frank, much too timid to contemplate the effect which his words might have upon the lady whom he was addressing, "that others beside Hemming must have had a hand in it—I am indeed."

"Heard? Where have you heard this, sir?" responded Kate Bankes, in a shrill and eager tone.

"I heard a good deal one night; but you know I might have been dreaming."

"Drat it, I feared as much," rejoined Kitty parenthetically; "it would be a nice way of repaying our kindness to go and blab against those who's spent their lives in your sarvice, sir, though it's I as says it as shouldn't. But there's no truth in it—not a word, I'll be sworn."

"I pity his poor wife," returned Wyvil, scarcely appearing to heed her words; "she was a tidy wench, poor Betsy Hemming. However, she'll be well rid of him."

"I don't know nothing about it; it's no affair of ours, not in the least. I don't know what you can have heard, sir, that I don't; but there's so many ill-natured folks as is always picking holes in their neighbours."

"I may have been dreaming, you know, Miss Bankes, and I was rather wandering, wasn't I, when I was so hospitably entertained here?" he said in a half whisper, approaching closer to the window. "One evening I had crept downstairs and fallen asleep in the parlour, and when I awoke it was all dark, but there were voices in the kitchen, and I heard a good deal about getting Dick Hemming to shoot the Oddingley Bony; but," he pursued, slily eyeing the confused countenance of Miss Kitty, "you know I may have been wandering or dreaming, as I said."

"Wandering—for shame, Mr. Wyvil! You wouldn't have me believe that a real born gentleman would ever betray those who had saved his life—you wouldn't?"

"Certainly not. But it is an awkward business, you must admit; for what I heard thus casually may have been heard by others again and again. I heard the Captain complain that one of them had been blabbing at the public. Where is Dick Hemming?"

"How can I tell? It is not certain as he did it—not at all. Well, sir, I can't be wasting my time, as I'm very busy just now; but I trust, sir, as you'll behave as a true gentleman, I do."

"I owe you a debt of gratitude, Miss Bankes."

"It ain't much like it, to come and cast suspicions upon honest folks who have befriended you—it ain't, indeed."

"I hope they'll catch Dick Hemming, for I believe he did it."

"Good morning, Mr. Wyvil, for I can't awhile to stay;" so saying she slammed to the lattice and vanished.

Frank rode slowly through the village and past the Rectory. Meeting a man coming out of the foldyard gate, he halted and inquired after the widow.

"There be the inquest agoing on," he returned, after answering his inquiries.

"Who shot the Parson?"

"Dick Hemming did it for sartain," replied the man; "but I doesn't think as ever they'll give it agin' him—they be too much consarned, that 'em be."

"Who do you mean?"

"Them as is on the jury. Why, the Captain be foreman, and the lot on 'em be there."

"A bad business."

"It be a bad business, and I doesn't see how they'll ever get at the bottom on it, that I doesn't."

Forced to content himself with this fragmentary intelligence, Frank Wyvil pursued his way to Hallowcliffe, where he found the household in a state of mingled curiosity and terror in consequence of the murder. When he informed them of his visit to Oddingley he was minutely questioned upon all he had heard and seen.

The ladies entreated him not to return to Boughfield by the lane, so he passed through Droitwich, and took the opportunity of visiting the cottage of Elizabeth Hemming. He found the poor woman in tears, and terrified lest her husband should return and be apprehended by the constables, who were on the watch for him. Notwithstanding the ill-treatment she had received at his hands, she dreaded the fate which seemed to be impending over him.

"He's a lot more sinned again' nor sinning, as they says," she remarked, "and the deed's on their heads in God's eyes. There be plenty on 'em as 'll have to answer for it, I knows, and the Captain among 'em—that there be."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MURDERER'S FATE.

THE verdict given, Captain Evans abruptly retired from the presence of the corpse, and slunk homewards by a pathway through the fields. He looked anxiously around him as he walked, and, proceeding at a brisk pace, entered his house by the back door.

"Confound it, Kitty, I hope that nothing's been seen of that fellow about our premises. We're none of us safe so long as he is prowling around the neighbourhood. He is Tom Clewes' boon companion, and he should know how to settle that vagabond's hash."

The Captain's temper was not improved by his niece's account of Frank Wyvil's visit. His frame of mind was a most unenviable one. He knew that Mr. Pendrell and his brother magistrates at Droitwich had set the constables on Hemming's track, and that at any moment the man might be captured. Once in the hands of justice there was no knowing what revelations he might be induced to make, or to what extent he himself might be involved as an accessory to the crime. For some time he walked up and down the parlour, until, wearied with his own thoughts, he returned to the kitchen, where old Mrs. Bankes was crouching beside the chimney.

"A bad business, Captain," she muttered.

"Confound it, what business is it of yours? I don't know what's a bad business," he returned in a low voice.

"I always thought that Dick Hemming was about no

good," she added, without heeding his remark, which, owing to her deafness, she had possibly not heard.

"Ay, indeed, I wish he were at the devil, and thou too, for the matter o' that." So saying he walked out, unable any longer to stand the woman's prattle. He spent the remainder of the day in a state of restless agitation. A little before eight o'clock a visitor arrived, one Joseph Taylor, the farrier from Wych. This latter, who was an old man of between seventy and eighty years of age, had been to Cotheridge, and had ridden round by Oddingley to see his friend the Captain. The latter invited him into the parlour, and the two remained there, closeted over their grog, for more than two hours. Towards ten o'clock Kitty knocked at the door.

"What's the matter, child?" cried the Captain.

"It's nigh upon ten o'clock, Captain."

"Send them all to bed, girl, and get thee to bed as well. I'll let Mr. Taylor out. We may need George, but send all the rest to bed."

Half an hour later the household were asleep with the exception of the two elderly men and young George.

It was a dark night when the three stepped down the lane leading to Netherwood Farm. The boy carried a lanthorn, while his two seniors, with stout sticks in their hands, followed him along the turf flanking the rutty road. That there had been some agreement between Evans and Clewes as to the precise time of their meeting there can be little doubt. Clewes stated that he had seen the Captain in the morning, and that the hour of their tryst had been fixed. Clewes had been quite as careful as the Captain in sending all his household to bed. He himself waited in his kitchen until a few minutes before the clock struck eleven, and then, with a bottle of brandy under his arm, stepped out by the back door, which he closed and locked, tarrying outside the barn until he heard the approaching footsteps of the Captain and his companions in the lane.

But few words passed between the four individuals, and those were in a whisper.

"He is safe inside," said Clewes, in reply to the Captain's question.

Whether the latter speaker carried a bludgeon in his hand it is impossible to ascertain. The only narrative which has

come to us of these events is in the confession of Thomas Clewes, whose main object was obviously to screen himself from suspicion, which he could only do by casting the onus of the crime upon his companions.

The four men entered the barn.

"Halloo, Hemming," cried the Captain in a low voice, "where beest?"

A rustling was heard at the far end of the bay.

"Yes, sir," replied Dick.

The men stepped on to the raised platform of the bay, about the height of a man's knee above the floor of the barn. They were unable to distinguish the individual of whom they were in pursuit by the light of their single lanthorn. He was covered with straw in the far corner of the recess.

"Get thee up, Hemming," said Evans, "I've got some meat for thee."

The wretched man rose from a lying posture. He appeared to have been reposing on his back when he lifted up his head from among the straw on which he had lain concealed. As he was rising one of the party struck two or three stout blows with a heavy stick about his head. In his confession Thomas Clewes charges the act upon the old man Joseph Taylor, who had been dead some years when these disclosures were made.

Those blows were sufficient.

The Captain is said to have observed, "Now he has got enough;" to which Taylor replied, "What is to be done with him now?"

"Confound his body," returned the veteran warrior, "we must not take him out of doors. Somebody might see us, may happen."

A spade was produced.

"We'll soon put him safe," added the Captain.

After performing this deed in the darkness of the night the men proceeded to dig a grave close beneath the western wall of the barn, of which the outer side was washed by the waters of a cowpool. As soon as the four men had completed their task by the light of their single lanthorn, they took up the corpse of the murdered man, whose head was fractured by the severe blows which they had dealt upon it with their blood sticks, and carefully laid it, clothes and all, in this receptacle. They covered it up as well as they could,

and after treading and beating down the new-laid earth, they scattered hay and straw over the spot so as to conceal all appearance of the transaction.

Twenty-four years afterwards a grave was discovered in the bay of the barn, two feet six inches below the surface of the soil. Within it lay buried a body which was sworn to as that of Richard Hemming. A pair of shoes and a carpenter's rule were identified as having belonged to the murdered man. Of the clothes nothing but the buttons remained, but the conformation of the various fragments of the skeleton corresponded with the characteristics of his person.

The Captain and his two companions returned homewards in the dark, scarce uttering a word as they proceeded on their way. It is probable that they were too intent upon their own safety to reflect much upon the awful deed in which they had been concerned. But, nevertheless, could their thoughts have been laid bare a striking diversity would have been discovered in their several modes of viewing the affair. The Captain looked upon the whole matter with something of a military eye, and imagined himself to be conducting a retreat from some nocturnal ambush. Old Taylor had acted more or less as Evans' tool in the matter. He was afraid of the Captain, and ready to do his behests upon all occasions. He was not squeamish on the subject of crime, and might not have been deterred from its commission by any scruples of conscience. It was on this account that the Captain had decided to select him as his confederate upon the occasion. Nevertheless, he felt that he had been inveigled into a greater complicity than he had intended, and he felt a secret resentment towards Evans in consequence. As to young George Bankes, he was utterly scared at what he had seen, for he had not previously realised what was going to take place. He had always been accustomed to yield a blind obedience to the Captain in everything, and it would never have occurred to him to oppose his will in the slightest degree. The poor boy felt crushed and stupefied by the scene which he had witnessed, and in which he had borne an involuntary part.

After a dreary midnight walk, they reached the back door of the farmhouse under the church, and all three crept quietly into the parlour. After striking a light the Captain

fetched the spirits out of the cupboard, and filling three tumblers with a strong solution of alcohol, said: "I'll tell you what it is; we three have all slipped our necks into the halter, and if any one of the four that were present peaches, we shall every one of us swing for it. You know it well enough, Joe, but this young George here—I want him to understand. Dost hark, boy? Thou'lt hang for it as sure as thou ever breathest a word of what thou'st seen to-night."

On the following day Clewes rose betimes and went off to Pershore fair. This was on Thursday, the 26th of June. Many years afterwards he stated that George Bankes and John Barnett came up to him in the fair between four and five in the afternoon, and invited him to the Plough Inn, where they gave him the money which had been destined for Hemming. It was wrapped in two parcels, and amounted in all to twenty-seven pounds. In giving it to him, either Bankes or Barnett said: "Here is some money for you that Hemming was to have had. Be sure you never split." A few days later he averred that he was waiting in a room at Captain Evans' when Catherine Bankes came in, and taking him by the coat with both her hands, went down on her knees and begged he would never say a word, as she was fearful the Captain had been doing bad things, and she feared that if he spoke, some of them would come to be hanged.

On the following Sunday, the 29th of June, the body of the Rev. George Parker was consigned to the earth, the funeral taking place in Oddingley Church, conducted by the Rev. Denham Cookes, who preached a sermon upon the occasion. It is related that some of those farmers who had assisted at the gathering at the Plough Inn at Tibberton a few weeks before, contemplated the melancholy spectacle with a cold satisfaction, and even cracked jokes over the coffin of their victim.

Soon after these events, Thomas Clewes, with the assistance of his carter, carried several loads of marl into his yard, a portion of which he spread over the bay of the barn where the body of Hemming was lying. When this latter was levelled down, probably by Clewes himself, a load of seed-vetches was placed over it. For nearly twenty-four years the ground remained undisturbed.

It may have been for the purpose of diverting suspicion from the true spot that, three days after Mr. Parker's murder,

Captain Evans caused a clover-rick to be made in his foldyard, which remained standing for nine or ten years. When Captain Evans quitted the farm about two years later, he sold the rick to his successor, John Barnett, who caused it to be rethatched and left standing.

Elizabeth Hemming was kept in a state of terror by the repeated searches made in her house. The neighbours, far from sympathising with the unfortunate woman in her distress, avoided her as if she had been contaminated by the guilt of her wretched husband. There was only one exception to the rule. One young man, named Edward Newbury, struck by the sad but beautiful countenance of the widow, and pitying her loneliness, befriended her in her distress. The result was that after a time he married her, and thus commenced an era of brighter days for the hitherto unhappy wife of the murderer. Nevertheless, the memories of her former life frequently haunted her, and she had occasionally visions of Richard Hemming appealing to her for vengeance. More than once she had spoken to Mr. Pendrell and other magistrates on the subject, and the fact of her suspicions reached the ears of Captain Evans and the Oddingley farmers. In order to allay these a letter was penned at the supposed dictation of Richard Hemming, dated from America and posted in some English seaport, assuring her that he was alive and thriving in the United States. Her marriage with Edward Newbury may have rendered her all the more anxious to disprove the genuineness of this communication. It is certain that she made a formal deposition before the magistrates to the effect that she strongly suspected that the body of her late husband was concealed under the clover-rick erected by Captain Evans, and then in the possession of John Barnett, in the foldyard of the Church Farm at Oddingley. In consequence of this deposition a warrant was granted to search the rick. The strangest part of the story is that when the constables went to the farm to examine the rick they found that it had been totally removed during the preceding night, and that no one could give any account of how or whither it was removed. The constables dug the ground on which it stood, but without finding anything. This was a clever expedient of the conspirators to allay any suspicions touching the true spot where the body was concealed.

In 1809 Captain Evans retired to a small estate pleasantly

situated on the borders of Newland Common, where he remained until 1826, when he removed to a small house in Friar Street, Droitwich. It is said that he lived in a state of melancholy foreboding, and showed himself but rarely outside his premises. He kept the doors and windows barred and bolted, and it was with difficulty that visitors gained admittance into his house. After his removal to Droitwich he was almost entirely confined to the house by age and infirmities. In the daytime he would sit with a large Bible open before him, but if any cause of provocation arose he would nevertheless give vent to his former oaths and imprecations, even with his hand upon the Bible at the time. His relative, Miss Catherine Bankes, died in 1822 (while he was living at the Grange), and was buried in S. Peter's Church. She was his favourite child, and he caused a vault to be prepared for himself by her side.

It is said that during the last few weeks of his life he was more than usually restless and agitated, and that he was seen to point to vacancy and cry out: "Take him away, take him away from my bedside." The parson of S. Peter's called to visit him on his deathbed, but was refused admittance. At length, at the beginning of June 1829, he died at the age of ninety-six, and was buried on the 6th of that month in S. Peter's Church.

On Thursday, the 21st of January following—seven months after Evans' death—Charles Burton, brother to Elizabeth Hemming, being employed in taking down the old barn at Netherwood Farm, came upon the grave where his brother-in-law had been buried. He found a pair of shoes, a carpenter's rule and the bones, and felt certain they were those of his murdered relative. The bones were lying as though the body had been cast in upon its left side, while the skull was beaten into a great many pieces. The surgeon testified to the fractures in the skull having taken place while the person was living, or immediately after death. On the Tuesday following (namely, the 26th January 1830) a coroner's inquest was held at Worcester upon the remains of Richard Hemming. After a patient examination of the evidence they found a verdict of wilful murder against Thomas Clewes and George Bankes, and that such murder was committed on the night of the 25th of June 1806, and

they further found that John Barnett, farmer, was an accessory to such murder before the fact.

On the 11th of March 1830, the prisoners were tried before Mr. Justice Littledale at the Worcestershire Lent assizes. In the opinion of the judge there was no sufficient evidence to convict Thomas Clewes as principal, and that, not being indicted as an accessory after the fact, it only remained for him to be acquitted. The jury finally declared him not guilty. On the 12th of March, Clewes, Bankes, and Barnett were liberated by the under-sheriff with the following remark against their names: "*Standing indicted as accessories to a murder, but the principal felon not having been tried, and being now dead, and the prisoners therefore declining to plead, they are to be discharged.*" Under the law as it then stood, accessories to a murder could not be convicted when the guilt of the principal felon was not established.

The bells at Oddingley Church chimed merrily on the evening of the liberation of these men, as if to prove that the luckless village had not yet emerged from the state of degradation in which it had lain for the last three centuries.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

THAT same summer of 1806 witnessed the nuptials of Francis Wyvil with the lovely Madeleine de S. Pol. In those days the Catholic sacrament had to be supplemented by the only legal form then recognised by the State, namely, the marriage service of the Established Church. Both ceremonies were performed at Boughfield in the presence of a considerable number of Catholics invited for the occasion. The bride and bridegroom then drove off to Malvern, and thence to the Wye, where they spent their honeymoon, on their way towards the family place in Monmouthshire to which Wyvil had lately succeeded.

Constance and her uncle were among the few Protestants who assisted at the wedding. The former continued to correspond with Madeleine, but we have never heard whether she made any farther advances towards the true faith, or whether the prejudices of her early education proved too strong for the grace of conversion which seemed at one time to be offered for her acceptance.

The marriage of Madeleine was followed at a brief interval by the untimely death of her best and dearest friend, the beautiful Mrs. Mowbray, an event which cast a gloom upon the first months of her wedded life. Eight years elapsed before she was able to revisit her native country, when at length the restoration of the legitimate dynasty enabled her to regain the ancient Château and a portion of the estates of S. Pol.

Although the leading events recorded in this narrative occurred at the latter end of the eighteenth and at the dawn of the nineteenth century, yet the *dramatis personæ* have long since passed away, and nothing remains beyond the localities where these scenes transpired. If any of our readers should feel a passing interest in these annals of the gloomy crime which has imparted a certain notoriety to the parish of Oddingley, they will find the several spots whereat these desperate deeds of bloodshed were hatched and perpetrated, almost unaltered by the hand of time.

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